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HERODIAS

A DRAMATIC POEM

HERODIAS

NOTICES OF THE AMERICAN EDITION.

"I waited for 'Salome' (now called 'Herodias') to arrive. It came two days ago. I think. It was good to a surprise. But Channing carried off my book before I had done with it, and he is the best electrometer or pyrometer for the poetic flame I know, and he gave a good report. I found the book already named in the newspapers, but they will give no right guess of its merits for a time."—RALPH WALDO EMERSON to his brother.

"As a story, the dramatic interest is drawn out with ingenuity, from the few incidents contained in the sacred narrative, and is sustained with skill to the end. The poetical execution is of a high order. . . . I think 'Salome' ('Herodias') indicates the possession of very high poetical talent."—HON. EDWARD EVERETT to a friend.

"'Salome' ('Herodias') is a production of more than marked ability,—it is a broadly conceived, genially executed, oftentimes a truly superb poem. The repentance of Salome has a broad lyrical and musical sweep which seems like an opera of grand passions when the trivial associations of the opera are forgotten."—CHARLES G. LELAND, in the *Continental Monthly*.

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"The foundations of this great drama are laid in Jerusalem. . . . This, in its grandeur, is more than Greek—it is Hebrew—almost scriptural, indeed."—JOHN NEAL, in *Putnam's Monthly*.

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"The portraiture of Herodias is a masterly creation."—*New York Leader*.

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"A work which has made a deep impression on appreciative readers by its originality and power."—*New York Tribune*.

"A poem of great vigour and originality."—*Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*.

"The verdict which has already stamped it as grand will be very nearly confessed by all careful readers."—*Philadelphia North American and United States Gazette*.

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HERODIAS

A DRAMATIC POEM

BY

J. C. HEYWOOD

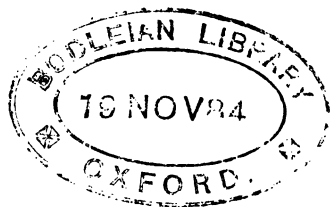
NEW EDITION, REVISED

LONDON

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“But when Herod’s birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod. Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask. And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist’s head in a charger. And the king was sorry : nevertheless for the oath’s sake and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her.”

SAINT MATTHEW.

SECOND LORD.

FIRST CAPTAIN.

SECOND CAPTAIN.

FIRST COURTIER.

SECOND COURTIER.

A VOICE.

PRINCE OF THE POWERS OF THE AIR.

A VOICE FROM THE FAR HEIGHTS.

PRINCE OF THE POWERS OF THE DEPTHS.

CHORUS, ROMANS AND JEWS.

SEMI-CHORUS, ROMANS,

SEMI-CHORUS, JEWS.

OFFICERS, COURTIER, ATTENDANTS, ETC.

SCENE:—Jerusalem.

TIME :—The night in which John the Baptist was beheaded.

DURATION OF ACTION :—From sunset to sunrise.

HERODIAS.



PROLOGUE.

A DUNGEON.

JOHN BAPTIST *in a trance ; Heaven opened ; the
heavenly host gathered before the throne.*

ALL THE HEAVENLY HOST.

LIGHT invisible ;
Light-giving Darkness inscrutable ;
Source unprovided, Source all-receiving ;
Boundless Duration which, yearless, enduring not still is ;
Sternness unwavering, limitless ; infinite, movable Tender-
ness ;
Omnipresent and sleepless Benevolence ; Vengeance
asleep omnipresent ;
Ever creating and restless Creator, from finished creation
resting forever ;
Justice that seeth not, feeleth not ; feeling for all and
all-seeing Pity ;
Hidden and fathomless Mystery, mysteries hidden re-
vealing ;

Measureless Grace all-pervading ; Charity all-centring ;
Love invincible, all-overcoming ;
Holiness, Holiness, Holiness ;
Father of Christus,
Glory, majesty, victory and honour be unto Thee
Forever and ever and ever.
Amen.

A VOICE.

He hath gone to the vineyard alone ; is there no one to
help ?

ARCHANGELS.

There is none ; He must gather alone.

VOICE.

He treadeth the wine-press alone ; is there no one to
help ?

ARCHANGELS.

There is none ; He must tread it alone.

VOICE.

The Dragon assaileth Him alone ; is there no one to
help ?

ARCHANGELS.

There is none ; He must conquer alone.

VOICE.

Grief's archers sore press Him alone ; is there no one to
help ?

ARCHANGELS.

There is none ; He must pierced be alone.

VOICE.

Death's sorrows o'erwhelm Him alone ; is there no one
to help ?

ARCHANGELS.

There is none ; He shall vanquish alone.

VOICE.

Hell's legions assault Him alone ; is there no one to
help ?

ARCHANGELS.

There is none ; He shall triumph alone.

ALL THE HEAVENLY HOST.

Alleluiah !

He shall receive

The kingdom, the majesty, the power and the glory,
Forever and ever and ever.

Amen.

CHERUBIM.

Encircling worlds that in their courses roll
And sweep the sky from zenith to the pole ;
Empyrean orbs that in the welkin shine,
Unfading foot-rests of the Cause divine ;
Glad morning stars that sing when each day's sun
'Ginneth its round as was the first begun ;
Flame-shooting cloud-cars with their thunder-sound
That ford the air and quake the solid ground ;
Rebellious seas that caged reluct and roar,
And bellowing oceans breaking down the shore ;
New-formed creations by insparing hand

Flung into space or beckoned from the land ;
All these Thy might and majesty proclaim,
But Thou in them dost magnify Thy name
And Thy great glory less, Most Holy One,
Than in the mission of Thine Holy Son.

ALL THE HEAVENLY HOST.

Hosanna !
Glory and majesty, victory and honour be unto Thee
Forever and ever and ever.
Amen.

SERAPHIM.

Comets that sweep along the lightning's path ;
Thy blazing meteor-messengers of wrath ;
Rivers of light that roll on starry sands
Athwart the heavens to worlds fresh from Thy hands,
O'erwhelming with their waves chaotic night,
Fulfilling Thy command, " Let there be light ;"
Auroral floods of flame that up the north
Flow towards Thy throne and show Thy glory forth ;
Winds rushing from their caves to blast and slay ;
Life-bearing breezes driving death away ;
Careering hosts of storms in upper air
That in fierce chorus shout Thy praises there ;
And primal colours in their bending frame ;
All these Thy boundless love and power proclaim,
But magnify Thy name, Most Holy One,
Less than the mission of Thine Holy Son.

ALL THE HEAVENLY HOST.

Hosanna !
Glory and majesty, victory and honour be unto Thee

Forever and ever and ever.
Amen.

A VOICE.

A victor He shall return, and joyful with Him—

ARCHANGELS.

The ransomed captives of earth.

VOICE.

Triumphant He shall return, and joyful with Him—

ARCHANGELS.

The exiled, for His sake, of the Earth.

VOICE.

Almighty He shall return, and joyful with Him—

ARCHANGELS.

The poor and the weak of the earth.

VOICE.

Avenger He shall return, and joyful with Him—

ARCHANGELS.

The oppressed, for His sake, of the earth.

VOICE.

To judgment He shall return, and joyful with Him—

ARCHANGELS.

The just, for His sake, of the earth.

VOICE.

Redeemer He shall return, and joyful with Him—

ARCHANGELS.

His saints, the redeemed of the earth.

ALL THE HEAVENLY HOST.

Alleluiah !

He shall receive

The kingdom, the majesty, the power and the glory
Forever and ever and ever.

Amen.

Alpha, Omega ;

Ancient of Days Sempiternal ;

Trust ever changeless, immortal, life-giving ;

End without any beginning ; Beginning all endless ;

Bruised and Reviled and Rejected, the Mocked, the
Accused, the Condemned.

High-Priest self-offered for merciless foemen, enduring
and making atonement ;

Friend agonized, interceding ; sole Mediator unfailing ;
tremendous Avenger ;

Prince of Peace, Wonderful, Counsellor, Son of Man,
Mighty Lord God of Sabaoth ;

Pascal Lamb passively dying ; arisen Christ living for
ever ;

First Thought and Last Thought ; Space filling, Heaven-
ruling I Am ;

Final Hope ; Final Help ; Final Rewarder ;

Virgin-Born, human Immanuel ;

Son of the Father,

Glory, majesty, victory and honour be unto Thee
Forever and ever and ever.

Amen.

ARCHANGELS.

And Thou shalt reign—

ALL THE HEAVENLY HOST.

Forever and ever.

ARCHANGELS.

King of kings—

ALL THE HEAVENLY HOST.

Forever and ever.

ARCHANGELS.

And Lord of lords—

ALL THE HEAVENLY HOST.

Forever and ever.

King of kings

And Lord of lords

For ever and ever

And ever.

Amen.

The Vision passes.

JOHN BAPTIST.

My work is finished ; way made for the Word.
Earth heareth silent Thine approach, O Lord.
The stars from their firm places move aside,
Cerulean gates of Heaven open wide,
The King of Glory from His throne descendeth,

The darkling age of forms and shadows endeth.
For He shall claim among the sons of men
His kingdom, drive the usurper to his den,
Baptize His subjects with the Holy Ghost,
And seal them members of His heavenly host ;
Unbar tenebrious prisons of the soul,
And set it free from sin's supreme control ;
Banish all doubts to everlasting night,
Bring immortality and life to light.
My work is finished ; way made for the Word.
Earth trembleth with thine awful tread, O Lord.

My work is finished. Yet ere I depart
Show me Thyself again, and let my heart,
Filled with Thy certainty, question no more,
But Thee incarnate, doubting naught, adore.
The mysteries of prophecy unfold,
Realize prophetic visions seen of old,
And let me understand the mighty plan
Regeneration of degenerate man ;
How Thou wilt raise this people, lift their horn,
And let them be no more the heathen's scorn,
Avenge them of their foes and bring them home,
And safely shelter them from wrath to come.
Mine hour approaches, give me faith in Thee,
And with the Holy Ghost baptize Thou me.
My work is finished ; way made for the Word.
I have seen Thy salvation ; take me Lord.

Enter Salome.

SALOME.

All hail ! good master. From the sentinels

Of fierce intolerance ; from my mother's watch
By stealth and unattended have I escaped
To bring thee some refreshment.

JOHN BAPTIST.

Thank thee, child.

I have refreshment that thou know'st not of,
And I am strong in strength sent from on high.
Yet is thy presence balm to the weak parts
Of my humanity.

SALOME.

How went the day ?
Laden with tediousness ? Did the light hours
Go crouching down beneath a weight of grief
Mournfully lagging ?

JOHN BAPTIST.

Nay, the day was not,
Nor were there hours. Time now, for me, is passed,
Save when thou call'st me back to look on it
In thee. This is the last. I must go hence.

SALOME.

Where wilt thou go ?

JOHN BAPTIST.

Unto my dwelling-place.

SALOME.

Where is thy home ?

JOHN BAPTIST.

On earth within the hearts
Of those who follow me.

SALOME.

And hast thou one
Which is not on the earth? Where is it then?

JOHN BAPTIST.

Where thou at length shalt come.

SALOME.

I will go with thee.

JOHN BAPTIST.

Thou canst not.

SALOME.

I can all that woman may.
Who will supply thy wants?

JOHN BAPTIST.

I shall have none.

SALOME.

My comprehension cannot grasp thy scope.
Whither wilt go? Thou canst not leave this cell,
Unless the king in justice bid thee forth.

JOHN BAPTIST.

I know thou canst not understand me now ;

Thou wilt in time. But this I plainly say,
Thou shalt not listen to my voice again.

SALOME.

Ah, speak not so ; thou art but sad and faint.
Behold what I have brought ; refresh thyself—
Nay, take the wine ; and see, how rich these figs !
Wilt thou not let their blushing beauty tempt
Thy lips to embrace them ? Thou canst not refuse
These flowers. I saw them smiling in their dreams
And caught them ere they waked. With pleading look,
And trembling with affright they gaze at me,
Tears glittering on their cheeks and in their eyes.
They too are sad, for they are captives now.
Take fruit and flowers, and then thou wilt not say
Thy handmaid shall not visit thee again.

JOHN BAPTIST.

My child, I will not eat ; but from His throne
Jehovah seeth thine offering, to bless
The heart which prompted it. Yea, I am sad,
My soul is very sorrowful for thee.

SALOME.

For me ! Nay, for thyself. A prisoner thou,
I free as air and happy as were these flowers.
But cheer thee. I will try to set thee free.

JOHN BAPTIST.

And thou shalt do it.

SALOME.

Then how I will rejoice !

JOHN BAPTIST.

Nay, thou shalt mourn.

SALOME.

And thou ?

JOHN BAPTIST.

I shall rejoice.

At length, thy sorrow shall be turned to joy :

Blessed the sorrowful, they shall be glad,

And they who mourn, they shall be comforted.

SALOME.

Why should I mourn ?

JOHN BAPTIST.

For thine eternal good.

SALOME.

Thou talk'st but mystery ; unfold thyself.

JOHN BAPTIST.

Blessed be they who mourn. Lovest thou me ?

SALOME.

Thou knowest that I love thee.

JOHN BAPTIST.

Keep my words.

SALOME.

They are enshrined in me.

JOHN BAPTIST.

Lovest thou me ?

SALOME.

Now thou dost mock me ! must I say again
That I do love thee ?

JOHN BAPTIST.

Follow thou the Christ.

SALOME.

Where is He ?

JOHN BAPTIST.

He shall come to thee.

SALOME.

I will.

JOHN BAPTIST.

Lovest thou me ?

SALOME.

Nay, must I swear to thee ?

JOHN BAPTIST.

Follow the Christ, and come whither I go.

SALOME.

Wilt thou not cease to speak in paradox ?

JOHN BAPTIST.

Yea, I will speak no more ; have I not said
Thou shalt not listen to my voice again ?

SALOME.

'Twas but the wind of jest, that thou might'st see
How strong were my affections grown to thee.
I leave thee now, but take with me thy words ;
For, as thou know'st, King Herod with his lords
Keepeth a feast, and in the revelry,
Against my will, I must a sharer be.
But on the morrow I will come to tell
Thee of it all, and cheerful make thy cell.
The shadows, trembling, beckon me away :
Jehovah guard thee till the dawn of day.

JOHN BAPTIST.

My daughter, may God's benediction rest
Upon thy soul, and keep thee pure in heart !
Believe, and in thy sorrows thus be blest.
The Christ to thee eternal peace impart !

*Exit Salome.*CHORUS, *passing in the street.*

The sun dismounteth, day expires,
The colour from its full-flushed face
To ash hue paling ; veiled fires
In slow procession from their place,
The adytum of the great universe,
Come solemnly and spread a pall,
Deep pall of night, upon dead day,
Then lift their veils to watch. O'er all

The orient moon assumeth regent sway,
While stars the praises of the lost rehearse,
Mounting the sky to look upon her lord and counting
Him present whom afar she seeth and still more brightly
mounting.

CHORUS OF SPIRITS, *in the air.*

As the sun, so the life of the Son for a time shall depart ;
As the day in the night, so His body be laid in the tomb ;
As the moon mounteth up to the skies, so faith riseth to
heaven,
To see Him, and shine in His beams, and know that He
liveth.
Like the stars, His disciples shall watch through the
dark till He cometh,
Then shall lose themselves in, and thenceforth be a part
of His brightness.

I.

BANQUETING ROOM IN HEROD'S PALACE.

HEROD *and* HERODIAS *seated on thrones. Lords,
Captains, Courtiers, etc.*

FIRST LORD.

THIS is a fair, high day. King Herod meaneth
We shall have cause to wish him many such.
Didst thou come early to the banquet room ?

SECOND LORD.

Yea, I came in among the very first.
Full brightly and swiftly hath the revel sped,
And, comet-like, drawn on so fair a train,
So rich a galaxy of pulchritudes
Itself is lost to the eye of contemplation
In its bright tail increasing to the end.
Dull Satisfaction would await no more
Did not its guide and mother, Expectation,
Forever hungering and ne'er content,—
Which it doth follow as a timid child,
But never goeth before, nor long time leaveth,—
Foster its appetite to a fever awaiting
A course of beauty never yet imagined,
Reserved for delicate palates till the last.

FIRST LORD.

How sayest thou? What? A thing elysian
Which cunning messengers have won and brought,
More skilled than Orpheus? Or hath fraudulent Hermes
Been tempted to betray some new invention,
Some special, dear ebriety of the gods?
Or will warm Venus show her person here?
For surely all the richest flowers of earth,
Its choicest viands, draughts, and sweetest sounds,
The fairest nymphs and most enticing sirens
From every clime already grace this feast.

SECOND LORD.

So all must think, and none would ever dream
Of brighter, more alluring loveliness.
Yet here, where winds which saunter through the room
Go drunk with music hence, stagger and reel,
Like bacchantes, under festooned garlands green;
Where the atmosphere, by perfume overgone
From rose-bud lips of every blushing hue,
Carnation cheeks, and waving, lily hands,
Is coy, and will not let its breath be caught;
A perfume sweeter than arose of yore
From Hesperis, or than earth's lips exhaled
In virginal young life, ere bitten and parched;
Here, where the veiled love-*em*moving light,
As from an amorous beauty's half-closed lids,
Of these rich myriad lamps, whose jewels blaze
And seem themselves to generate the beams,
Serveth to show decoying, dangerous depths
Of dark, dissolving eyes, and snowy breasts

Rolling like seas with passion's fullest tides ;
Here, where the freshest floral wreaths grow dim,
Faded by warmth of woman's glowing charms ;
Here, where elysian joys invite the soul
To revel in an ecstasy of bliss,
I waiting stand, unblessed, till I behold,
Transcendent fair, like shell-borne Aphrodite,
The crowning glory of the feast appear.

Another part of the room.

FIRST CAPTAIN.

Hast seen this daughter of Herodias ?

SECOND CAPTAIN.

I have not ; but my memory containeth
Rich tales of her surpassing loveliness ;
Each tale a mirror, showing each a form,
Each form compact of Fancy's sweetest parts ;
Each part, each form, each mirror showing naught
But one sweet, changing, changeless, charming whole,
As in the mirror of the month is seen
Chaste Dian's phases, Dian still the same.

FIRST CAPTAIN.

For thee it will be well if, when she cometh,
These fancy-forms do not elude thy sight,
Thy magic mirrors turning to base metal,
And thy chaste Dian fade not from thy skies
To leave thee groping.

SECOND CAPTAIN.

I myself do fear
Lest vanish my supreme divinity,
This image rumour-made within my heart,
Chased from its shrine by hateful verity.

FIRST CAPTAIN.

List ! list ! the music !—She at length is here !
Curtains are withdrawn and Salome glides in dancing.
By all the immortal gods ! I swear those screens
Are of celestial groves the folding gates !
Surely the beauty from Olympus stoopeth,
Which floateth there ! What features ! Ah ! what form !
What grace ! She moveth on the air !

SECOND CAPTAIN.

By Jove !
I do believe that this is mere enchantment !

FIRST CAPTAIN.

Look at the king ! His fierce, admiring eyes
Devour her every motion. Wouldst thou think
His head could easy rest upon his couch
This night ? Soul-tossing, love-engendered spirits
Will they not drive smiles from his countenance,
Contentment from his heart, as sails are driven
From ships by southern gales, or fruits from shores
Of islands by tempestuous, angry waves
Which rage upon the great, the midland sea ;
And thus his sleep, which beareth him through night

As a good ship, be wrecked, he left to toss
And reach the coast of morn as best he may
By Hercules ! if I were but a king
My kingdom were too small a pay for love,
Or e'en possession, of that more than queen.
For her I could be Paris !

SECOND CAPTAIN.

Or Leander ?

Hast thou yet heard her voice ? Sure it must be
Like liquid silver bubbling from its fount
Through a cleft ruby ; though she need not speak,
For every motion talketh golden-tongued.

FIRST CAPTAIN.

Dost note the sad expression of her face ?
The downcast, curtained eyes ? She looketh as
She came to dance for pity more than praise ;
Led on by sorrow, not by vanity.

SECOND CAPTAIN.

Thou readest well. That melting countenance,
Those lids weighed down with pleas, eyes full of them,—
A jarring word would cause an overflow,—
Lips trembling with the rush of prisoned sobs,
And smiles which, spite of urging, wait, these spell
With potent charms. Not willing did she alight.
It was just now heard a neighbour say
That she was very loath to dance this night
Before the king : but yet because he wished it,
Obedient also to her mother's will,
She turned aside her flowing tears and came.

FIRST CAPTAIN.

Why this unwillingness?—and she so fair !
Why hath she never graced the court before ?
Doth modesty abhor, or pride disdain,
And bid her shun with fear, with scorn neglect
Worship gallant, such as awaiteth here ?

SECOND CAPTAIN.

For her the pure air of a maiden-bower
And tender converse of thoughts virginal,
The courtiers of her fancy, are more inviting,
While they to please this gentle queen adorn
Love-dreams and myths all beautiful.

FIRST CAPTAIN.

Perchance

Hath keenest subtlety, the cunning wight,
Secured a hiding-place where cupids sport,
In that sweet dale between twin hillocks white,
Whose crested summits nightly blush beneath
The setting rays from those soft-shining orbs
When they in slumber sink as sink warm suns
Into mid ocean at the close of day.
And thence he whispereth her ambitious heart
That, if she would have fame, unbounded fame,
She should not blind Imagination's sight,
Nor bind its tongue, nor spoil its ready pen,
Nor dull the colours which its pencil spreadeth
By cold realities that, Gorgon-like,
Turn warm, luxurious Fancy into stone.

SECOND CAPTAIN.

Nay, look again :—that tiny, timid ear,
Which frightened nestleth in those heavy locks,
Like an affrighted dove in foliage
Of a vine-arbor waving in the breeze,
Would flee in terror whisperings so sly.

FIRST CAPTAIN.

Her mother it is who striveth then to make
Her daughter famed as the flower which bloometh
But once within its life, a century,
And then, mayhap, on such a night as this.

SECOND CAPTAIN.

Her mother may dare all, for from her heart
Nature ashamed long since was driven away
By those relentless demon conquerors,
The glittering, armed array of woman's arts,
And vainly sought to hide its burning blush
Beneath the shading lids or bosom's snow
Of her, by sophistry, untutored child.

FIRST CAPTAIN.

With all her woman craft she well must know,
Though not the fair flower's beauty may give fame,
The mystery of its bloom when copulate
With fecund wonder surely will beget
Fame's substance, rumour, with conjecture winged
And echo-tongued to multiply itself.
Haply the maiden, in her royal pride,
Would such a blossom be, and not for worlds

The violet, beloved and known by all,
Placed in the bosom, carried on the heart,
But sought with curiosity, gazed at
With reverent awe, or spoken of with fear
By none. Yet she is wondrous beautiful !
A floweret ? Nay ! A vinery full of fruits !

SECOND CAPTAIN.

She waveth on the melody as floateth
A rapturous symphony upon a zephyr !

FIRST CAPTAIN.

Buoyed by her pride and woman's vanity !

SECOND CAPTAIN.

Thou wrong'st her ! In those palaces, from which
The rulers of her soul look on the world,
There is no pomp of vanity or pride,
But purest maiden modesty there reigneth,
And beauty concentrate of beauties all,
Which taketh form in thought and word and act :
Blended in holy harmony these rule,
While o'er her cheeks their mingling colours float,
And wave and rise and fall upon the breeze
Of her heart's gentle breathings.

FIRST CAPTAIN.

Since she came

Perforce, to make contentment discontent,
I can forgive her. From this time I see
As seeing not all others of her sex.
I have faced the sun and gazed at it too long ;
And now, even in the night, shall see no stars,
But everywhere the sun, the sun, the sun !

Another part of the room.

FIRST COURTIER.

There is a whisper moving in the air,
Like a faint mist which is and then is not,
Which even while thou observest thou wilt think
That thou dost see it not, no form espying.
This whisper saith, at least seemeth to say,
Or this, just now, it seemed to say to me,
Ere I could see 'twas naught, that a high place
In the young princess' favour hath been found
By prophet John, whom they surname the Baptist.
This whisper hath not dared approach the queen.
It talketh faintest murmurs, lest she hear.
It skulketh with the courtiers ; but abroad,
Far from the mother, stalketh as a stentor.
For 'tis well known Herodias hateth him,
And he now lieth in ward at her request.

SECOND COURTIER.

Hast seen this aqueous philosopher ?

FIRST COURTIER.

Once. At the even-tide, when softening air
My spirit had unmanned to melancholy,
Forth from the town I strayed alone and sought
A solitary place where unobserved
I might at pleasure humour the strange mood.
The occidental sun, warm from his course,
Had lain him languid down, and round his bed
Crimson and golden curtains closely drawn.

An amber mist rose from his smoking coursers
As they, with drooping necks and heaving flanks,
Drunk up the cool west wind and slaked their thirst.
Anon the moon full blushing left her couch,
Where Phoebus all the morn had fondled her,
And smiling walked the azure fields of heaven
Among her grazing star-flocks, seeing naught
But that her lord awaiteth in the west.
Silence in mid-air listened to the sound
Of music from a choir of far-off spheres,
While Rest stood on the heights and with her wand
Called Slumber down upon the sentient world,
Slumber which, like Penelope, at night
Ravelleth webs of toil knit through the day.
I turned from gazing on the heavens and saw
This same John Baptist musing, or in prayer.
A bunch of wild-flowers in his half-closed hand
Reposed upon his lap ; his look was turned
Toward the Hebrew temple, and, I thought,
From time to time words issued from his lips.
As I approached he saw me and arose,
And I was led by the sweet dignity,
Which mantled him from his majestic head,
The placid, manly beauty of his face,
The deep and thrilling tones that on his lips
Seemed lingeringly to dwell, then heavenward went,
The strange, soft light which flooded his deep eyes,
To tarry for a while and list to him
While he——

SECOND COURTIER.

Behold ! she kneeleth to the king,
As Iris smiling bendeth to the earth.

Darker than storm-cloud groweth the ireful queen
As she perceiveth Herod's fierce applause,
And noteth the enraptured look with which
He gazeth on her child.—List ! lo, he speaketh !

HEROD.

Well done, our peerless one, our conqueror,
Incomparable queen of beauty, grace,
And love. Ask what thou wilt and it is thine.
Tax now our bounty, even to the half
Of this our fair domain, and it is thine.
We swear it by the ever-living gods !

II.

GARDEN OF THE PALACE.

SEXTUS *and* ANTONIUS.

SEXTUS.

THAT is her chamber-shrine where enamoured vines
Up to the windows mount like lovers bold,
And carry clustering blossoms in their hands,
And whisper words, sweet words with fragrant breath
In through the casement. It is void and dark,
As is my life when she is out of sight.
That is her chamber, if the lying rogue,
To whom I paid a mina for his news,
Did not impose on me. But sit we here
While I await impatient her return.
And when we see that temple all aglow
With her bright presence then thou shalt depart.

ANTONIUS.

She loveth still? Thou hast unshaken faith?

SEXTUS.

Faith! yea, in her forever! Faith? Why man,
I tell thee faith is weak, is air, is naught
Compared with mighty certainty I feel
That she is changeless as the changeless truth.

She is herself the very truth of love.
I could as soon blaspheme the gods as doubt
Her constancy. I know no difference
Between such doubt and never-dying death.

ANTONIUS.

No absence, then, like dreary, beating storms,
Or dragging fogs thick charged with decay
Hath severed, or with corrosive tooth
Asunder gnawed love-chains thou hast riveted
On her caprices and inconstancy?

SEXTUS.

Nay, absence hath no rust can rust love's gold,
Nor can it gnaw such chains as those which bind
My love to me, but only show their strength.
Long time it is, ah me ! since last her eyes
Told me how much she loved, her gentle voice,
Assenting, echoed "love," her heart applauding.
My heart stood still to listen ; then it sang
A pæan, wild with joy, and sent in haste
Hot messengers through every burning vein,
And on each trembling nerve to every part,
Rushing with shouts and calling loud "She loveth."

ANTONIUS.

Thou talk'st like lovers, lovers talk like fools.
That must have been a fearful day for thee.
Thy heart was a volcano belching fire,
And those hot messengers were lava streams.
'Tis wonderful how thou could'st have escaped
A general conflagration. When was this?

SEXTUS.

'Twas at December's solstice—

ANTONIUS.

Fortunate

For thee the weather was so cold.

SEXTUS.

Since then

Through the long winter of absence have I seen
Nor heard aught of her ; but I come with Spring—
The laughing Spring which now hath just been born,
Whose great god-mother Nature at its birth
O'erspread recumbent Earth parturient
With drapery of varied, festive green,
Embroiderèd with beauty blossoming
In every form, in every colour rich ;
The whole perfumed with rarest odours fresh
From fields Olympian, distilled in dews
And scattered by the mist-clad morning hours.
She calleth to rejoicing her domains
With laughing voice, heard thunder-like afar,
And biddeth seneschals with splendors meet
Build wide triumphal arches to the skies,
Brilliant with stones of every primal hue,
In semicircles bending vast and grand
Before each cloudy castle in the heights
Ethereal ; from pillared forest halls
And lofty mountain bastions imminent
Hang out her leafy banners blossom-starred ;
In every vale and each responsive grove
Collect orchestral hosts, concentual choirs

To fill the vault with anthems jubilant,
While echoes, rushing on from every side,
Dance in mid-air, and from empyreal hills
Fall, like the mingling songs of singing birds,
The sounds of bells from shining astral towers.
So I, with joy's harmonious confusion,
By every sign and sound of gladness mingled,
While Nature holdeth this high festival,
Would celebrate my joy-inspiring Spring,
The end of absence, and would find my cure
From sickness of impatience in its presence.

ANTONIUS.

Mayst thou be cured ! for thou indeed art sick.

SEXTUS.

I seek my love, and from her lips will hear
Confessions which, for me, fill the universe
With all the music of a thousand worlds
Commingled in one anthem, sweeter tones
Than harp of muse or siren ere gave forth,
Which float on every zephyr to mine ears,
"I love thee ! how I love thee, my beloved !"

ANTONIUS.

Safely delivered of this gale of words,
A hot simoom to any man of sense,
I presently will minister to thee
A cooling draught.

SEXTUS.

There is no need. I am chilled,
Even to the marrow, by thine atmosphere.
Thou art winter like.

ANTONIUS.

Of thy dear will I speak.

If she seem constant, seeming still to love,
Some mighty obstacle doth intervene
Between the purpose of her stubborn will
And its accomplishment. Call back thy wits !
Safely concealed beneath yon Cupid's locks,
Or in his quiver cased and hidden there,
Behold Perversity, who driveth Love
To conflicts obstinate ; and his hot zeal
The unobservant crowd will still declare
To be but proofs of Love's persistency,
Love's deathless ardour ; Love the while grown chill,
Drooping with weariness, ready to die,
Yea, dropping lifeless at the very goal.

SEXTUS.

If my dear seem still constant ! If she seem !
A truce to old parables ! She doth not seem !
There is no seeming in a soul so true.
She is Love's angel !

ANTONIUS.

Nay, if thou dost think

Her subject only to that blind god's will ;
If thou dost think this pertinacity,
Endurance resolute of all the pains,
The pangs, the miseries, of so-called love—
Which from its sufferings is passion called—
But manifest affection's constancy,
Why out upon thee for a maudlin fool !

And yet thou art wise—would that I too could dream
And catch bliss blinded ! Yea, I envy thee,
And can forgive thy folly. May the gods
Preserve it to thee ! Folly it is most sweet,
For a most sweetly foolish thing, a woman.
Only be fool enough never to see
What reason draggeth to thy averted eyes ;
Only be fool enough never to hear
What reason iterateth in thine ears,
Conclusions damning from most damnèd facts ;
Only be fool enough never to feel
The lash of jealousy which reason plieth,
And thou may'st count thyself the most blest fool
That ever aired his folly on the back
Of the errant butterfly, a woman's love.
Yet mind thy folly do not get unhorsed
And break its neck and reason take its seat.
Trust in Love's constancy, and still believe
That thy love's charms are consecrate to thee.
I will not waken thee from such a dream.

SEXTUS.

Thou canst not waken me ; I do not sleep.
Nor rouse me from my dreams ; I do not dream.
Thou didst conjecture well ; I frankly own it.
Yet thy poor argument is jester's wit,
A random shaft. Laughing philosopher
Thou shouldst be named ; for though thou dost not
smile,
But art as grave as images on tombs,
Thou mak'st thy fellows laugh, and thus in them
Dost all thy sourness unto sweetness turn.

We separated are, my love and I,
By highest wall of adamantine hate,
Upon whose dark and frowning battlements
Suspicion's sentinels keep their sharp watch.

ANTONIUS.

And thou shalt wait long time, ere they will sleep.

SEXTUS.

Her mother doth not deign to look on me,
Save with disdain and fierce lip-curling scorn.

ANTONIUS.

Giving thy merits steeped in vinegar
To cool her daughter's fever ; stay her not.
I am no doctor if she make the cure.
Thou art a handsome youth. Faith, I believe
That she would hate thee less if thou didst woo
Herself and not her child.

SEXTUS.

Something is in me,
Which turneth her ambition into spite
When it but looketh on me.

ANTONIUS.

Were I judge,
From the loud baying of thy most fair parts
They have aroused that fierce game jealousy.

SEXTUS.

Nay, stick to thine own trade, philosophy !

Thou art no sportsman and thine ear is bad.
Follow the hounds thus and thou wilt be lost
In some vile thicket.

ANTONIUS.

There is an alchemy
Which changeth tender impulse into scorn ;
The common people call it poverty.

SEXTUS.

Oh ! that I have infused in my blood,
And by inheritance made doubly mine.
Father and mother both left it to me,
Not in their wills, but with their testaments.

ANTONIUS.

Grandmother Nature, then, adopted thee
And well-nigh spoiled her darling with fair gifts
And rich allowance of all virtues rare,
Which thou dost like a cunning miser keep.
And thou dost well. Thou wouldst have more applause
If thou didst waste them more.

SEXTUS.

Perhaps, from fools,
Not friends, and such applause would make me deaf.

ANTONIUS.

Loudest applause doth mostly come from fools.
There was a time when virtues were a dower
Greater than kingdoms ; but that time is dead.
Though hale and hardy it still began to die

When the hundred-headed earth-worm, Luxury,
'Gan gnaw its vitals, weave a gauzy web
Stronger than iron fetters on its limbs,
Envenoming pure air with baneful breath.

SEXTUS.

If I have virtues they are not mine own.
I may not spend them lightly if I would.
I got all virtues from mine ancestors.
My fathers were of that old Roman stock
Which lovèd liberty, that sterner sort
Which would not kiss the dust ; that nobler sort
Which could not be enslaved. They lovèd Rome.
They loved not Cæsars ; and when Cæsar sought
Rome to possess, and when Rome Cæsar's was,
Then Rome for them a ravished mother was,
Cæsar the ravisher.

ANTONIUS.

Thou speak'st too frankly.
These walls may have no ears, but I have a tongue.

SEXTUS.

A soldier thou, my comrade ; 'tis enough.
This mother's honour quick to vindicate
My father's father thought it not too dear
To give all he enjoyed and add his life.
It was in vain, and that same Roman name
Thou now mayst read stuck high upon a pole,
Branded conspirator and left to rot,
By the vindictive hangman tyranny.
My father, still a youth, withdrew himself

Into a valley far removed from Rome,
Or that which had been Rome, and lived alone
With the young Roman girl who called him spouse,
Who was the only one could bring a smile
To his stern features, place a bow of light
On the dark storm-cloud hanging o'er his brow
Ready to give forth thunders.

ANTONIUS.

Mournèd he?

SEXTUS.

He was too proud ; for in him lived the worth,,
Nobility and lofty dignity,
The stern contempt for creeping sycophants,
The mighty scorn for fawning flatterers
And hatred of imperial despotism
Concentered of an incontaminate race
Of Roman freemen. So have I been told.

ANTONIUS.

Couldst thou not note this greatness for thyself?

SEXTUS.

I never saw him ; ere I lived he died.
Giving me life my mother gave her own.
I knew not whence I came. I never knew
Mother, nor father, nor the love of kin.
The first man like, I all uncared for grew
And, like him, felt alone ; for my poor nurse,
Who thought to do me good by rearing me,
Died too and left me ere I was a youth.

Then heard I tell of great Germanicus,
And then I went with him unto the wars.
Whene'er his godlike eye rested upon me
I thought myself like Mars armipotent.
Foes melted at my glance. The battle done,
I slunk into myself, went to my tent,
And wondered at me and at my fruitlessness,
That honours ripen not in sunny youth,
But intempestive sprout to shiver in snows
Upon the brow of age and barren die.
I murmured that life's vigorous vines in spring
Could not mature and yield their luscious juice
To cool Spring's feverous thirst. I cried, Give now
The goblet brimming with concentrate life,
And from its inspiration let me breathe
Thoughts all in flames, or flames in act concrete
To dazzle the astonished world and draw
The plaudits of all men, that I may be
Placed in their hearts and live no more alone.
Let me flash out and warm the frozen world
With my great, glowing brightness, then content
I will a blasted crater be for ever !
'Twas the delirium of loneliness
O'ermastering my boy's wisdom. I had not learned
That greatness is the loneliest of things.

ANTONIUS.

Why, so it is, yet great men covet it.
But having in themselves some parts of all men,
When they are great enough to achieve it greatly
Each is a system sphered within himself
And hath no need of outer satellites.

SEXTUS.

I questioned if I ever could be great
And win the love of great Germanicus.
He was my god, and often would his eye
Be on me when I felt but saw it not,
Until, one day, with strangely tender words
Embracing me, my valour he extolled,
And in his voice there was a sound of tears,
As in the south wind cometh sound of rain.
He bade me to his tent, and there I dwelt,
And thus abided with him till he died.

ANTONIUS.

Having such honour I had asked no more
But to have died with him.

SEXTUS.

Could that have been

I had not outlived Rome nor ever felt
The bitterest bitterness of bitter grief.
The noblest he, the best, last Roman was.
In him died Rome for me, and I thenceforth
No more a Roman, evermore a man,
All countries were my country, every land
My home, the world my dreary dwelling-place.
So that nor country, home, nor dwelling-place,
Nor aught but mine own solitude had I.

ANTONIUS.

That love of country is only egotism
Disguised in virtue's vestures and the name
By one form borne of Protean selfishness.

SEXTUS.

I found the earth was very much alike
Where'er I went, or e'er rapacious man
Had ravished Nature of her virgin charms.
I saw but valley, mountain, hill and dale,
Meadow and forest, flowers and singing birds,
Rivers and lakes, seas fawning on the lands,
And islands sea-borne floating noiselessly.

ANTONIUS.

Thou art right. Man loveth self and self's own works,
And love of country calleth this—for shame !
Party of patriot virtues claimeth all,
And factions name their spirit patriotism ;
It verily is with the disguise torn off.—
I will not hinder thee ; I like thy tale.

SEXTUS.

Thou knowest how he died, Germanicus.
With all the ardour of a passionate soul
I vowed eternal vengeance on his foes
Who durst usurp the office of the fates
And hasten him to Hades in his bloom.
I joined the northern hordes that I might fight
Against Rome? Nay ; against her enemies,
His murderers most foul, most treacherous.
Thus taken captive while I sought to die,
Laden with chains, along the Sacred Way
I marched, a traitor branded, to my fate.
Music's wild bursts sprang quivering in the air
Like jets from golden founts ; applauding shouts
Struck the swift winds and made the breezes reel,

While conquerors' wreaths like fluttering flocks of birds
Light on the car triumphal from each side.
A Roman vestment marked me as I passed
A special object for the frenzied hate
Of throngs unfeeling hurling savage jeers
Like stones and firebrands on a fettered foe.

ANTONIUS.

The coward brutes ! Wolves were more generous !

SEXTUS.

But as these injuries rained upon mine ears
I felt my stature grow, my heart expand.
I knew a power of virtue in my breast
That made me like a god ; and then I smiled.
I seemed to fill all space, and with contempt
Looked down on human malice, scorn and rage,
In soul invulnerable, fearing naught
Which human hate could do. Thus I passed on.
That night in Cæsar's palace Pleasure gave
To mocking Mirthfulness a marriage-feast
And mad Intoxication with a torch
Played Hymen's part and joined the unholy two.
Lewd Wantonness attended on the bride,
And lustful License sat as groomsman there.
And they essayed to ornament the revel
With beauteous half-draped forms, with amorous eyes,
With mazy motions of lascivious grace
And with seductive strains of music soft.
By sacrilegious hands sweet Modesty,
Was forced, deep blushing, from her sacred shrine,
Her veil torn off, her beauties all exposed

While on her glared gloating Concupiscence.
And Chastity, compelled to be a guest,
Closed her pure lids and clasped her pleading hands
In vain entreaty to be sent away.

ANTONIUS.

O Rome ! O Rome ! the rot is at thy core !

SEXTUS.

The morrow came. The amphitheatre,
A monstrous crater, hissed and shrieked and moaned
Surging and heaving with the fiery life
Which mounted up, up to the very top
As climbing blazes seethe and writhe and sough.
And at the bottom Death, with threatening growls,
Anon terrific roars and quaking cries,
In every cavern, in a hundred forms
Lying in wait, glared out with blood-shot eyes
From sunken sockets dark, and gnashed its teeth
With thundering crash, meanwhile the scorching sand
Like lava burnt instinct with agony.
I stepped on the arena, stood alone.
In all that flaring life there was no torch,
No tongue of flame had kindled in my soul
Affection's glow, nor lit the cheering light
Of gentle friendliness, love's sympathy.
I stood alone. I felt as if all Rome
With all her generations gazed at me.

ANTONIUS.

The mighty dead are present at great deeds
To which they gather as the gods at feasts.

SEXTUS.

Near by me seemed to stand those giant shades :
He who could bear to be death's instrument
On his own offspring, for a broken law,
And, by his duty braced and his proud soul,
Wavered even less than death ; he who could hold
His hand all sensible in jaws of fire
Till it was eaten off by stinging teeth,
And from the ordeal shrink less than the flame :
He who of his own body made a tower,
And of his mighty sword a battery reared,
And of his trusty shield a rampart high,
To give recoil to the enemies of Rome
Till father Tiber, on his tawny back,
Should bear the bridge away which, treacherously,
Astride his shoulders ingress stood to make
For fierce hostility and ravening war ;
Then who, ere the angry foe could obviate,
In heavy armour swam the river home :
The mighty three who on their brazen shields
Their sweet lives proffered, at the bid of Rome,
To sturdy three of Alba, should these have
Appreciation which outvalued those
In valour's keen discernment : he who plunged
With his good steed into the black abyss :
And those, Cornelia's jewels, robbed from her,
Torn from their caskets, but not lost to Rome,
By an insensate mob ; with those brave souls
Who in the Senate, on the ides of March,
Proved Roman mothers faithful to their lords.
Thus, then, I stood, and fear slunk shamed away

And hid itself from me. I did not try
To show I felt no terror, stand erect,
Folding my arms and bracing out my feet
And putting on the many flimsy tricks
Which the ass cowardice, when in a fright,
So oft mistaketh for a lion's skin ;
I stood as I would stand to talk with thee—

ANTONIUS.

Would I had been there to have applauded thee !

SEXTUS.

And waiting patiently looked at the beasts
Which lashed their sides and bit the iron bars
And gloated on me from their hideous dens.
And then I gazed above me at the crowd
And calmly scanned its agitated waves,
Till in the imperial gallery a form
Which was not of the earth, nor sea, nor air,
But seemed all of my dreams to be compound ;
A form of so surprising loveliness
It were as if the earth and sea and air
To make it up had given lavishly
Their qualities of loveliness most rare
From their most secret treasure-houses brought ;
A form that in itself compacted held
More winning grace than ever goddess wore,
Pure woman's beauties, richest womanhood,
The gentle tenderness and tender love,
The loving sympathy, strong fortitude,
Weak strength and weakness strong, and modesty
Which while repelling most, doth most invite :

A form of all the fairest, woman's form ;
A form which mastered me, made me forget
Life, death, past, future, pleasure, pain, joy, grief
The while its eyes looked downward into mine
Until I felt them meet mine midway down,
And in their greeting kiss all sense was lost.

ANTONIUS.

Ah ! it was there, then, that thy wits were lost !
And yet thou livest ! Did the Emperor see
Thou wert an innocent and pity thee ?

SEXTUS.

In that one instant's meeting of our eyes
All objects sensible seemed to dissolve
And like a vision pass to nothingness.
Meantime interior being conscious grew
To full existence limitless of joy.
This for a moment ; then, as if ashamed,
Her eyes withdrew themselves and stooping hid
Behind warm lids, as suns behind fair clouds,
While all her face was lighted with a blush
Like that which on the face of Hesperus
Is called at twilight by young Night's first kiss
A moment more and she was on her knees,
Resistless impulse of a generous soul
In the pure bosom of a gentle girl
O'ermastering maiden shame and timidity,
Before Tiberius—" His life ! His life !"
I heard no more, I saw no more—enough !
I felt the strength of all the Titans swell
The knotty sinews of my naked arm.

I could have rent even Death himself in twain.
And now I grapple him, for I am knit
In deadly conflict with the king of beasts.
Slow suffocating silence, stygian air,
Hangeth around the strife, the throng benumbeth
For one dread minute ; then through upper space
From that piled cloud of faces fulminate
Reverberating thunders, peal on peal.
And now they roll away and seem to die
In labyrinthine caverns of mine ears,
Which grow interminable as I fall
Insensible a conqueror on the sand
Before swift messengers of Cæsar's will
Can bear me forth to life and liberty.

ANTONIUS.

Come, let me hug thee,—ay, thou hast made me rich
By drawing forth these samples of rare gems
Forgotten in some crevice of my spheres.

SEXTUS.

From such beginning grew apace our love,
Nurtured from time to time by stolen words
And richly watered with the maiden's tears,
Refreshed by sigh-heaved breezes, made more strong
And rooted firmly by rough storms of spite.
For ere this love-tree brought forth other fruit
Than tear-drops, heart-aches, long drawn breaths, sweet
dreams,
Sad wakings, lonely watchfulness and fasts
And leaves verse-covered ending all in rhymes,
A thoughtless, tell-tale youth, Ingenuousness,

Though free from malice, did us mighty harm ;
For he betrayed us to Herodias
As she her daughter with sharp questions plied.

ANTONIUS.

Then thou wast sent away ?

SEXTUS.

Yea, I was sent,
By Cæsar's order, straightway to the army,
Where by my valour, I attained the rank
Which brought me near to thee, made all forget
The virtue which they called my treachery,
And gave me hope that with its glowing breath
Fame would consume the animosity,
Or thaw the obdurate purpose, strong and cold,
With which the mother wardeth me from mine.

ANTONIUS.

Thou lendest faith too generously, for hope
Is a false prophet, known to thee by this ;
He never prophesieth aught but good.

SEXTUS.

I know him false, I need not arguments.

ANTONIUS.

Why, then how hast thou faith in thy love's love ?
While this enclosing barrier remaineth
That caged elf, that cross Perversity,
Like cur in leash will struggle to be free :
Undo the bars and thou shalt straightway see
Desire to stay hath fettered liberty.

SEXTUS.

A truce, a truce. I pray thee rail no more.
If thou hadst ever loved how couldst thou ask,
"She loveth still? thou hast unshaken faith?"
I tell thee faith is love and love is faith!
Thou never hast loved or thou wouldst never have
asked
If constant lover have a constant faith.

ANTONIUS.

I have loved!—loved a more than paragon!
Fairer than heaven, more pure than stellar light,
As morning beautiful, as evening tender,
Modest as silent, thickest veiled night,
But warm in love as a midsummer's day.
She trusted me, she loved me as her god.
She thought that I would do no wrong, nor could.
She gave me blushing lips which did not blush
So much as her soft cheeks; she gave her arms
To twine about my neck as clinging vines,
While rose-tipped fingers from her lily hands
Like pendant fuschia blossoms trembling hung.
She gave her eager, palpitating heart,
Into my breast close nestling to mine own,
And with the twilight of her sinking lids
Shed dews ecstatic on mine ardent soul.
So much did trust me, did so much desire
To make me happy, sacrifice herself
And prove the rich perfection of her love,
In hearty fulness casting out all fear,
To give me something more than all she was,

And all she had, and all she ever hoped,—
Had I been offered for that sweet girl's love
The eternal empire of a rotund world
I would have spurned the bribe into the wastes
Of wildest chaos in undiscovered space
To perish vilely there.

SEXTUS.

Now thou dost rave
As rave strained bacchanals insane with drink.
'Twas passion, 'twas not love.

ANTONIUS.

I tell thee, man,
She was my world ; my sunlight her regard,
My blushing morn and eve her tender cheeks,
My heaven her orbs, my midnight her gemmed hair,
My fountains, tenderness in her deep eyes,
My clouds her sadness and her tears my storms,
Her lips the coral of my summer sea,
Her teeth the foam strewn by its laughing billows,
Her breath my air, my breezes her soft voice,
My two rose-gardens her two rounded breasts,
My vale of Tempe, vale of sweet repose,
The vale between those fragrant garden mounds
Lying in sweetest shade ; my dwelling-place,
My home, my citadel, her loving heart.

SEXTUS.

Ah, thou wast happy. She deserved thy love.

ANTONIUS.

Yea, she deserved it, as all women do,

And I was happy as all men who love.
I was more full of lying faith than thou ;
And when we parted with her sighs she sobbed
That she could ne'er forget—they all say that
As they "mamma" say ere they go alone—
Another ne'er could love, not even a friend
Should share her thoughts, by entering desecrate
The temple to me only consecrate,
Her heart, where her affections waiting stood
To offer sacrifice. Her arms she flung,
Her lovely, loving arms about my neck
And strained me to her bosom, as the earth
Fast-kissing oceans huggeth to her breast,
While flowing tears, two sighing cascades, fell
Adown the flowery heights of her fair cheeks.
I wept, less for mine own than for her grief,
And my great tears rained down upon her brow
And lay a coronal of crystal drops,
Fresh manhood's purest tears on purest brow.
I would that I could then and there have died,
That she had strangled me in that embrace
Through very ecstasy of passionate grief.
Thus would her love have opened the gates,
And led me to Elysium doubting naught.
Pillowed upon her breast I then had said
That lingering good-night, that last good-night,
And my departing shade would have returned
To say once more good-night !

SEXTUS.

Alas ! poor friend !

Thy selfishness is but too natural.

'Tis so much sweeter to be mourned than mourn !
And then she died ere thy too late return ?

ANTONIUS.

She died ? Thou mock'st me, by the gods ! She died ?
By Hecate, I'll tell thee how she died !
Leaving my human nature there with her,
My loving nature, all my tenderness,
I went with my brave soldiers to the field.
Her love had turned me to a conquering god,
Or absence from her to a vengeful fiend.
I sought but to be terrible to foes
And thus to kindle round my storm-girt brow
Fame's dazzling halo ; when I should return
That I might place it on her blushing front
And say I have won this changeless crown for thee.
I saw upon the distant, serried foe
The gleam of armour, as the light of flames
Flaring along the fore-front of a storm.
Then arrows fell like flights of shooting-stars,
And glancing spears like blazing comets rushed,
And flashing swords like fiery meteors fell.
I maddened in the fury, exultant laughed.
I wrested glory from the grasp of Death.
I forced Death's self to place upon my head
Wreath after wreath with his own grudging hands.
I made Death's mighty voice my deeds proclaim,
And when he set on me I drove him back
Howling with rage to his infernal caves.
I carved my name on pyramids of slain
And sent it down to Pluto's shuddering realm

Shrieked out in chorus by the flying souls
Of hosts barbarian, and all for her.

SEXTUS.

I wronged thee ; thou hast loved.

ANTONIUS.

Have I not, man ?

And thus I wrought my immortality,
And dyed it royal purple with king's blood,
And proudly wore it as a kingly robe
To leave behind me, when beneath the earth
I shall at length descend, with blazon shown
I' the gallery of Fame for reverent gaze
Of ages yet to come. Thus did I work
For three long years, ere the triumphant host
Of Cæsar's legions, from the blood-stained snows
Of northern victories, bent their mighty tread
Toward the seven-seated, blood-gilt throne
Of their great mistress, all-controlling Rome.
When drawing nearer her I could not bide
The spoil-encumbered army's stately march,
But with the winds I hastened on before
To outrun Rumor in its rapid course
And be the first to tell my love the tale,
The first to see the ruddy light reflected
Of my great glory in her blushing cheeks
And the deep waters of her beaming eyes ;
The first to see her tremble faint for joy ;
The first to feel the flutterings of her heart ;
The first to feel her short and panting breath ;
The first, the only one to see these signs,

The first, the only one to feel these proofs,
The first, the only one to understand
The cause and meaning of these signs and proofs—
These signs and proofs sacred to rapture and me.
Like valour speeding to the fields of love
I hastened on, impatient as the storm
By desert heated and by south wind driven.
Horses beneath me melted in my course
And dew-cold fields grew parched and fiery hot.

SEXTUS.

Ay, thou hast loved as only true men love.

ANTONIUS.

At last I neared the place—in nurse's arms
A child, a baby twelvemonths old, perchance,
Stretched out its little hands—it was her child !
I took it to my bosom, fondled it
While my great heart was turning into stone.
The currents of my blood were bound in ice,
Thought was congealed, the world inanimate,
All save that little child which pulled my beard,
Smiled in my face its treacherous mother's smile.
And then she stood before me in her babe,
And then I kissed it in an agony,
And then it laughed aloud and said "papa."
But suddenly a mist came in mine eyes.
Betwixt the child and me a manly form,
A bearded Roman's form, with mocking smile,
Eyes haughty and defiant, seemed to rise
And with a look of triumph gaze on me.
Beside myself I flung away that child,

Her little child, and fled, and fled, and fled.
She died? If she had died I had been blessed,
For then my grief, roused and allayed at once
By memory of her love, had been a joy—
A joy immensurate compared with pangs
Which I do suffer now.—But I forget.
I vowed to curse and laugh, and I do weep !
It is in jest—think not these tears be real.
This wise I think I humbly may confess
My mother was a woman. I will shed
My half which is not man, and then this source
Of salted waters will be flinty rock
Through sorrow-fending apathy made callous.
This inborn weakness oozing from mine eyes
Will shortly all be spent, and in my strength
With hate intensest, bitterest, I will hate
As I have loved !

SEXTUS.

Alas ! I pity thee.

ANTONIUS.

Nay, do not pity me. I scorn the thought
Of sympathy for such fool's sufferings.
I would embrace a flame—I have it not,
Nor proof that it was mine, save this fell smart.
Make me not hate thee also for thy pity !

SEXTUS.

What was her name ?

ANTONIUS.

Her name !—I tell it not !
Never again shall that infernal word

Escape its prison-house within these lips !—
And yet—and yet—I would it might escape—
It cankereth my heart—I spit it out,
And cherish it no more. 'Twas Livia.

SEXTUS.

And thou—where didst thou go ?

ANTONIUS.

To the far east
Where I had never been, where no one knew me.
And there, with a new name and an old heart,
I tried to throw away a blasted life,
Which clingeth to me as a gibing phantom.
Seasons succeeded, armies went and came,
But I remained, vicegerent of Destruction,
Unknown save by my deeds and the new style
I had chosen : aye companionless till thou
With valor, gentleness, and sympathy
All unexpressed didst win me from myself.
Night groweth on to its full middle age
And with its darkness turneth black my liver.
If I were not ashamed and were alone
This cursèd melancholy I would drown
Like a blind puppy, in a flood of tears.
I was a dolt to be bewitched by thee,
And by my love for thee kept from the feast ;
Else merriment had spread a rosy bed
And I had held oblivion in mine arms.
But now I go to sleep upon a thorn,
And to my heart a stinging memory hug.
Yet execrated memories of my woes,



Nor weariness of this day's march, nor yet
The allurements of this great and festive city
Can win from me the burning consciousness
I am on my way to Rome, nor me content
To tarry on the journey one short night.
I would I dared to tell thee what I hope
And fear to find in Rome ;—I dare not do it !
Good-night. I mock no more, and thou alone
Mayst hotly cherish that fool Fancy's dreams.
Yet, be they ever so warm they bring forth naught
But freezing disappointment. Now good-night.

Exit Antonius.

SEXTUS.

Good-night. Alas ! how great a ship was wrecked
And lost its freight on that most fickle sand ;
A freight more precious than the East affordeth,
Though Phoebus' treasury were emptied for it.
The winds of love, which seemed so prosperous
And followed yielding sails with pressing suit,
By their own favour driving swift the bark,
Compelled the shock and tore the canvas down.
The beaten vessel drifteth now amain
Till haply under leaden skies it sink.

CHORUS, *in the banqueting room.*

Troll the bowl, wreathe the bowl, drain the bowl, sing !
Bacchus shall cheer us while Herod is king !
Thyrus with emblems of Venus entwine,
Venus hath coloured with red lips the wine.
Troll the bowl, wreathe the bowl, drain the bowl cheerily.
Long live King Herod ! long live and merrily.

Troll the bowl, wreathe the bowl, drain the bowl, sing !
Venus shall cheer us while Herod is king !
Tables like those on Olympus are graced,
Bacchus and Venus have met and embraced.
Troll the bowl, wreathe the bowl, drain the bowl cheerily.
Long live King Herod ! long live and merrily.

SEXTUS.

The revel runneth mad as night advanceth.
But to my Cyprus cometh my fair day.
My love is in her chamber, and my heart
Leapeth as it would enter with the vines.
Her window openeth as the gates of morning ;
Bedazzled night withdraweth, shadows hide
Behind the trees and slyly peep at her.
I know that Neptune passing by this way
Would think her lips were stolen from his realm
And try to take them ; seeing thus her teeth
Would bear the casket to his treasury.
And thirsting Jupiter would stoop to drink
At her full eyes believing them rare founts
Irradiant with treasured light of heaven.
The Graces, since she doth their offices,
With one another play. Fair Hebe once,
When exercising Juno's gaudy birds,
Beheld her and is evermore afraid
Lest some god find and bring her to Olympus.
But Venus is not jealous of my darling
Because she is so pure. O vision rare !
Within the embrasure now herself she seateth,
Upon her dimpled hand her dimpled cheek—
O cheek too happy having rest so fair,

Too happy hand to hold so fair a fruit !
Five fondling fingers blush with eagerness
And press more closely like a lover's lips.—
She is alone, she sigheth. Imprisoned bird !
Dear bird of Paradise ! take all a life
Of wildest liberty for one sweet hour
Of sweet imprisonment in that sweet cage
With thee. Still lovest me ? I will try magic,
Soft music's magic, and my wand shall be
The old familiar song,—not yet. I must
One moment more enjoy what is too rare,
Too glorious itself for aught more real
Than magic's witcheries. What if the strain
Should break the spell and make the vision melt
To thinnest air, fading away in night ?
Ah ! faithless lover ! is this then thy faith ?

Sings.

 Stooping from thy window, love,
 Listen to my sighing
 While from heated wastes above
 Zephyrs, slowly flying,
Seek cool vales of earth and lie beneath the shadows
 dying.

 Hear me from thy window, love.

 Stooping from thy window, love,
 Listen to my story.
 While the smiling spheres above
 Veil thee with their glory,
Ere Night's thickly clustering tresses shall grow thin and
 hoary,
 Hear me from thy window, love.

Stooping from thy window, love,
List the vows I am paying.
While in milky-ways above
Goddesses are straying,
I to thee, my deity, I to thee am praying.
Hear me from thy window, love.

Stooping from thy window, love,
Maiden coyness scorning
List ere dawn on heights above
Lighting tints of morning,
Call thy loving love away with its bale fire warning.
Hear me from thy window, love.

Enter Salome.

SALOME.

Was that some cruel cheat of my wild brain
Which would torment my heart with mockeries?
Was it some echo from the revelry
Coming to mock me with sweet semblances?
Or did I hear again the signal song
Which, like a beacon, used in happier days
To guide me to safe anchorage of love?
Or have my thoughts, by some mysterious power,
Called up its buried image from the tombs
Of silent memory and bid it walk
Among the hated phantoms of the feast,
Which, leering, haunt me still? Fearful I search
While hope and doubt within my breast debate
And anxiously may question of the cause
Until unsympathizing verity

Shall drive me back with disappointment's whips,
Or else, most happy, with encircling arms—

SEXTUS.

Thy lover clasp thee—hush ! 'tis I, 'tis I——
And steal a joy from heaven—nay, not a word !
I will no breath of this sweet substance lose
Since, for one blissful moment, all is mine.

SALOME.

Nay—let me look at thee. Yea, it is thou !

SEXTUS.

Dear ! it was I ; I think it is not now,
For I so feel my life commix with thine
That thus, when lost in thee, I no more am.

SALOME.

Nay, still thou art, for thee I feel and hear,
Ah me ! and love—I nothing ne'er could love,
Thou therefore something art, that something dear
The something I first loved, which something was
Thyself.

SEXTUS.

Sweet reasoner ! I am but half myself,
Or something less, and yet I am something more ;
For this compounded being, this new life
Is so much greater than that former life
That this of sweet existence doth devour
In one swift moment more than that in years
All made of days whose hours are centuries.
Sweet love !

SALOME.

Nay—I will strive—yet could not do it
Did I not know thy gentle strength would win.

SEXTUS.

Sweet life !

SALOME.

Ah me !

SEXTUS.

What ! sighs !

SALOME.

Thou dost not talk !

'Tis so much happiness to hear thy voice !
Thy words to me confirmed assurance give
That thou art here—say I am thine !

SEXTUS.

Mine ! mine !

I stand upon the pinnacle of bliss,
The very summit of the mount of joy,
O'ertopping heaven's high walls, and look within.
I would not lose thy love to be a god
And rule Olympus :—tell me thou art not changed.

SALOME.

I changed ? I did not hear aright. I changed ?
Thou art my love. Can mists refuse to rise
Toward the sun and wander where they list ?
Can tides refuse to leap toward the moon ?
When they shall change will my affections cease

Toward thyself to rise. Are true stars moved
From their bright constancy by wooing winds ?
Will they not shine so long as the sun shineth ?
Thou art my sun ; if ever I lose thy light
I shall be seen no more.

SEXTUS.

Sweet heart ! sweet soul !

That kiss shall tell thee I never had a doubt ;
And this shall tell thee that I never will ;
And this upon thy dear, pale forehead placed,
Thy forehead like the soft and crescent moon
Reposing underneath the wings of night,
Shall give thee dreams of my sure constancy ;
And this upon thy softly falling lids,
Whose fringing lashes as the shadows lie
On wooded shore of a dark, moon-lit lake,
Shall blind-fold thee to all my jealousies ;
And these on either cheek sweetly attest
That Friendship wandereth arm in arm with Love
Through these sweet gardens, rose and lily beds ;
And this,—and this,—and this,—upon thy lips
Shall seal my life in thee, so that henceforth
While I am with thee I am with my life,
When separate thou hast my life, I die.—
So silent, love ! Yea, rest thy pretty head,
And hide those tender eyes, if so thou wilt,
From jealous stars, upon my steadfast breast.
Let not those envious archers shoot their rays
At thy faith-beaming lights to put them out ;
For they, like diamonds shining in the dark,
But softer and fairer have put the stars to shame.

SALOME.

Ah, Sextus ! cease !

SEXTUS.

If overseeing comets,
Those lantern-bearing stewards of the gods
With silvery robes of office trailing wide,
Who rove the star fields to observe their growth
And crop the stale ones, while reclaiming planets
Which wandering far astray might trample them ;—
Should one of these espy thine opening orbs
He straightway in his book would note two stars
Freshly expanding dewy in shady nooks,
And add them to his list.

SALOME.

Deride them not.

SEXTUS.

Now raise them once and give me one full look,
That of it I may drink to drunkenness ; give
I am a very epicure in love
Without the abstinence which knoweth to deal
In temperate measure. Make me drunk, my love,
And speak one word to let me know thy thoughts
Do not play truant ; speak one word, my life,
Or I shall coax it from thy bashful lips.

SALOME.

Nay, if in that love-language thou wilt talk,
Give me a kiss, which shall inform my choice,

Resolving all its doubts. This night, even now,
I danced before the king at his command,
Whereat he swore a mighty oath to give me
Whatever I would ask.

SEXTUS.

A generous king.

SALOME.

What shall I ask? A dazzling coronet
To bind about these darkly flowing locks,
With burning sapphires clustering on my brow
As Pleiads hanging on the brow of night?
A grayish misty robe with brilliants decked
And silvery purple train like that of morn?
A veil of golden gauze such as infoldeth
Saturnia's rounded form, half hiding charms,
When through the violet curtains of her chamber
Abroad she cometh with her smiling maids,
That thus more pleasing I may seem to thee?

SEXTUS.

Dear heart, that were a giddy woman's choice,
Not thine, nor mine; for I so love thee best
Simply enrobed, as sorteth with thy grace,
Thy purity, woman's true majesty.

SALOME.

Ah! then I know what thou wouldst have me ask—
I will not ask it.

SEXTUS.

What is it, my fairy?

SALOME.

I know.

SEXTUS.

What ? what ?

SALOME.

The strongest, fleetest steeds
That winds of Arab desert e'er begot,
Swift as the coursing, emulating fires
Which in ethereal amphitheatres
On nights appointed hold Olympic games
And prizes win before the assembled stars.

SEXTUS.

What wouldst thou do with them, sweet obstinacy ?

SALOME.

Oh, we could flee away and leave pursuit
To die o'erheated in bootless chase,
While malice and detraction gnaw their cheeks
In speechless impotence ; injustice, pride,
And stern ambition build their flinty walls,
To separate us happy fugitives,
Of tenfold thickness, ready against our coming ;
Yet for our coming, bent with captor's chains,
From cloud-embattled watch-towers gaze in vain.

SEXTUS.

And whither should we go ? Where rest secure ?

SALOME.

Ah, we could find some flowery wilderness

In distant, unknown lands, some gentle vale
Around whose borders in protecting curves
Above each other hills and mountains rise
With softened outlines, like aspiring dreams.
And on their buttresses and domes sublime
Sweet-scented forests spread their flowing robes
Of varied green, which hang as creeping vines
Upon the bastion crags and turret heights
Of sunny, antiquated palaces.
And on their sides brooks hanging, trembling glance,
And waving cascades gleam adown mid-air
As streamers which, long since, were shaken out
To the mild breezes on a festival,
From these same palaces, and left to float
Till lost their colours day by day and paled
To silvery whiteness, bleached and glittering.

SEXTUS.

Dear tantalizer ! How should we dwell there ?

SALOME.

Our palaces those mountains and their sides
The pastures for our flocks, and in the vale
Our tent, our home should be. Full flowering shrubs
Should form its trellised sides, its archèd roof
Starred with vine blossoms, covered all with vines,
Must be protected by tall trees which stand
Like thine own strong and bearded veterans,
Or Cæsar's, fresh returned from Gallic wars,
In armour green, spears waving in their hands ;
Who never sleep, but guard us silently,
Or only speak in whispers when they must.

There could we dwell so happy, nay, so far
Above the ken of common happiness
That it, for us, would be unhappiness.

SEXTUS.

Ah ! sweet tormentor ! I did question thee
To have the dear assurance of thy love
In some new phrase. Thou art half persuaded now
To follow me, yield to my selfishness,
Trust to mine arm for thy security
And for thy happiness to my true heart.
But 'tis not for my selfishness alone ;
I plead to thee as well for thine own meed.
In soul no longer two, why parted stand,
Nor go beyond this parting iron wall,
Obdurate tyranny unreasoning ?

SALOME.

I would, and yet would not ; urge me no more.
When I cannot, with thee I would away,
But when I can, I shrink and must say nay.
When thou art far I fain would fly to thee,
But when thou art here, ah ! then—why should I flee ?
Have confidence in Love ; though he is not cunning
Nor wise he hath a most persistent will,
And he will find for us some remedy.

SEXTUS.

Faith without action doth accomplish naught ;
Faith guiding action doth accomplish all.
Though I do love thee more for thy sweet faith,
Trust not too much to all-assuming Love.

SALOME.

What ! dost thou slight Love ? ah ! that is permitted,
For it is not Love whom I love, but thou.

SEXTUS.

I slight him not, lest, quitting, he delude me,
Yet much distrust his skilfulness as guide
By wisest ways to accomplishments the wisest.

SALOME.

Thou dost not follow him ? Alas ! I thought
He guided thee to me.

SEXTUS.

And so he did,
He is a sure guide to thee ; he followeth
And findeth thee where'er thou hid'st thyself.
But let him not have Reason's torch to bear ;
He always quencheth it. I have followed him,
Seeking asylum from malignant ills
Which keep us from our perfect happiness.
I sought with him a castle magical,
Of which he ever talked, said it was his,
Easy to reach if we would but set out,
Founded on clouds and towering to the skies
With white-browed battlements and dungeon keeps
And silvery turrets high and glittering moats,
Portcullis crimson, amber-coloured gates,
Full manned with sleepless guardians golden clad—

SALOME.

All brave and true ?

SEXTUS.

As Hector, true and brave,
When enemies approach prepared to throw
Over the fortress frowning armour black
And meteors hurl against a hapless foe,
Serpents of vivid flame which dart and wind
And hiss, and in their writhing folds embrace
And crush their victim with terrific roarings,
Or dry his blood and lap away his breath
With their hot forkèd tongues and fiery touch.
Within the castle amber, mellow light
Shed from the myriad precious stones which form
The ceilings high, and of dividing walls
Mosaic mirrors make, from which the beams
Reflected glance and tremble with a sound
Of softest music—

SALOME.

Oh ! a paradise !

SEXTUS.

Is it not, dear? And couches made of down
Whiter than plumage which the snow-cloud moulteeth
Swift flying through the air, and softer far
Than wings of hoar-frost melting at the touch.
Nymphs, silver-sandalled, crowned with aureate locks
On ivory shoulders falling, clad in gauze
Carnation tinted envying not the hue
Which mellower, richer, may be seen beneath
The generous covering, ready stand to bring
Delights of every kind ; and happy sleep
With gentle train of beauteous dreams awaiteth

To bring its balm refreshing to the sense
Wearied with joys, with pleasures overtasked.—
But why doth sudden sadness o'er thy face
Come like a cloud at noon? Nay, smile, my love.

SALOME.

It were a heaven for me to dwell with thee
In such a place, but ah! I could not go
Against my mother's will. Yet I have visions
Of dearest bliss in fleeing far with thee,
Far from this spot, where even breezes watch
Us to betray, which I cannot conceal.
They have themselves set forth in spite of me;
And I have blushed that they have been perceived,
Though by thee only, and I am self-condemned
For giving ear to disobedience,
And bowed with shame at mine own forwardness.
Visions so pleasing—are they innocent?

SEXTUS.

Ah! spare thyself, poor child, this self-reproof.
Thou art too tender, yet I love thee more
For that same tenderness. Nay, think not on it;
As innocent as thou who art innocence.—
We found it not, this castle magical.
Trusting no more to ardent Love's device
Whatever Reason biddeth we will do.

SALOME.

If Reason point a refuge and a way,
Which leadeth not through disobedience,
We will pursue the joys which thou hast sought.

I go before the king there to demand
A principedom for thyself where all thy powers,
The lofty nobleness of thy great soul,
The mighty scope of thy grand intellect,
Thy tenderness and kindly purposes,
Thy justice and compassionate intent,
Thy chaste ambition with its aims sublime,
Thy virtues brave and virtuous bravery,
Thy pious veneration for the gods ;
All great endowments which do make a man
Pre-eminently great among his kind——

SEXTUS.

My generous darling !

SALOME.

Nay—nay—let me speak—
Shall enter on a stage worthy of them
And their great dignity ; where they shall move
And act their parts so much beyond compare,
And show themselves of such a noble stuff
That all the gazing world must needs applaud
And call them composition nobler far
Than greatest Grecian poet ever sung ;
Name thee more worthy than the illustrious throng
Patrician which, so I too oft have heard,
Doth worship toward my chamber, as the Jews
Bow down and worship toward their holy mount.
Then all shall venerate thee as they ought
And deem thee godlike only less than I,
And think me of all women happiest,
Most fortunate, most envied, honoured, blessed.

I will a principedom ask for thee ; the king
For his oath's sake shall not deny me aught.

SEXTUS.

O best of all that best in woman is,
Name for all best in our humanity,
Thy reason creepeth not by weary steps
But moveth light-like : ask what thou wilt, love,
And be content for, be assured, 'tis best.

SALOME.

Ah me !

SEXTUS.

What is it ?

SALOME.

How could I forget !

How I am rendered ingrate by my joy !
Must selfishness mother in happiness ?

SEXTUS.

Let it be called injustice toward thyself.
Whence these false accusations ?

SALOME.

There is now

Lying in ward, shut in a prison drear,
A man, a prophet, or philosopher,
Who loveth me as his child.

SEXTUS.

Why is he there ?

SALOME.

I do not know ; those things are not for me.
Yet am I well persuaded for no wrong
Which he hath done ; he is incapable
Of aught but good, though wise as Socrates.
He hath instructed me in many things,
And I have tried to render less severe
His duress, though he seemeth not to feel it,
Nor scarce to know that he a prisoner is,
So free is his great soul.

SEXTUS.

What is his name ?

SALOME.

John Baptist ; 'twas just now, this very eve,
I left him promising that I would seek
To set him free ; though little did I think
So ready an occasion would be found.
He told me that my search should find success.
Now is the hour ; I will unto the king
And there demand John Baptist's liberty.
And for our fears and wishes, plans and hopes,
We'll leave them with the gods, distrusting not
That a good action be allowed to mar
The apt accomplishment of our desires,
Since our desires are just. Thou dost consent
To cease the search for perfect happiness
Almost secured, let fall maturing hopes,
That we may loose the bonds of innocence
And set the prisoner free by pious act,
Thine act, of gentleness ?

SEXTUS.

Do as thou hast said ;
Thy thoughts are god-inspired.

SALOME.

Or wilt thou think
I love thee aught the less if thus I yield
This vantage-ground to move all counteractions
Which keep us separate and make us mourn ?

SEXTUS.

O love ? O child ! O woman ! how to find
Names reverend of endearment worthy thee
I know not. I would call thee more than child,
Than woman more, if in the list of names
Of things in heaven, in earth, in upper air,
Or in the realms beneath a name there were
Which better named all that I venerate,
All that I love in beings less than gods,
Than that name woman. Princess of thy sex,
I know thou lovest me, know that thou art mine.
Do as thou say'st ; I follow thy pure thoughts,
The dictates of thine instinct generous,
As in the dark I find my way by stars.

CHORUS, *in the banqueting room.*

Wine ! wine ! beauty and wine !
Call back the vision of Iris divine
Passing on drops of a musical shower ;
Conjure it, king, with omnipotent power.
Royal wand richly with favours entwine,
Call back the vision of Iris divine.

Wine, wine, beauty and pleasure
Herod, the godlike, doth give without measure.

Wine! wine! beauty and wine!
Call back the vision of Venus divine
Rising on waves of a musical ocean,
Conjure it, king, for thy servants' devotion.
Here to her temple, her altar, her shrine,
Call back the vision of Venus divine.
Wine, wine, beauty and pleasure
Herod, the godlike, doth give without measure.

SEXTUS.

Nay, shudder not, they shall not have my goddess;
Not even in vision shalt thou pass before them.

HERODIAS, *in the palace.*

Salome! Speak! Where art thou, child? Salome!

SALOME.

List! 'Tis my mother's voice! Nay, I must go!
She seeketh me in my chamber. Steal away,
But come again. We will together bear
The welcome news of his deliverance
To John the Baptist. Ah!—yet, I must go.
But I will soon return to find thee here.

SEXTUS.

Can I not keep thee? Stay! I fear to loose
My hold on thee lest, disappearing, thou
Never come more.

SALOME.

Oh fie ! Hear'st thou ? She calleth.
Farewell one moment ; I am there and here.

SEXTUS.

Farewell, my love. I love to say farewell,
When 'tis but for a moment and thus said.
Farewell, farewell.

SALOME.

Farewell. Thou wilt remain ?

SEXTUS.

Yea, here. Farewell, my breath, my life, farewell.

Exit Salome.

The tide of night, fast rolling from the east,
Is rising to the flood, and on its waves
Stars glide as ships with glittering sails at sea ;
While in yon valley, in that tide's dark depths,
The sighing ghosts of lovers' broken vows
Wander disconsolate, like ocean nymphs
Bereft of lovers whispering still of love.
I will go sigh with them—nay, I will stay.
This boding silence aweth ; there is no noise,
Save the carouse which waxeth ever louder
And grateth dismal croakings on my sense,
Foretelling horrors. I would rather hear
The direst thunders ever yet that roared
Than this vile raven queen's presaging voice.
I feel as had bad omens crossed my path

For evil, and I wait to learn some ill.
Hist ! what be these strange mutterings in the air
As all the demons of hot Tartarus
Were plotting hell-plots near me ? I will draw
And stand prepared ; even fiends shall fright me not.

III.

THE QUEEN'S CHAMBER.

HERODIAS *and* SALOME.

HERODIAS.

SOON as fair Courtesy would let me quit
The courtly company in the banquet room
I sought thee. Well? Where hast thou been?

SALOME.

In the air.

Blinded and sickened by the glare of lights
Which gloated on me, and the creeping gaze
That fastened, stifling me, upon my heart;
From the blood-heating dance, which caused life's deeps
In tidal storms to break their thunderous waves
Upon the shores resounding of mine ears
I took refreshment proffered by the breeze
In the cool garden walks.

HERODIAS.

Why tremblest thou?
Am I an ague, that thou so dost quake
When I embrace thee?

SALOME.

Nay ; it is the dance ;
Or,—'tis a weariness—I know not what—
Which bringeth terrors—but I know not whence—
Formed formless from a void—I know not how ;
Yet they do shake me.

HERODIAS.

Thou hast naught to fear.
So thou dost please me with compliance, child,
I am thy bulwark. Few the dangers be
Which dare encounter me in seeking thee.

SALOME.

I would obey thee, yea I would do all
That daughter, maiden may ; ask me no more ;
I pray, so please thee, ask me not to dance,
Let me not dance again !

HERODIAS.

Thou shalt not dance.
Poor fawn ! thou fleest the baying of applause.
Why, thou hast worship had enough this night
To place among the gods a rounded score
Of women, yet thou weepest. Dry these springs
If natural, or rather let them flow
Till all be spent. No woman needeth tears
Save those she maketh. Ingenerate, briny tears
Should have been wasted, and their sources drained,
And covered deep with that dry growing moss,
Indifference, whilst thou wert still a babe.
If thou wouldst see tears cause them to be shed.

These showers are timeless now like spring-tide rains
In autumn. This is thy true harvest-home.
Thy beauty buds have opened full of fruit,
And thou must gather it. Thy mother dieth
Of hunger ; let her pluck thy waving grain.
She fainteth thirsting ; from thy flowing press
Give her to drink and flood life's ebbing tides.
Unclad she quaketh perishing with cold ;
Let her find warmth beneath thy burdened vines.
She blancheth with impatience, and its fires
Burn hot distress ; pass thine untasted cup
From moist, unready lips to hers which scorch.
Give consolation from thy royal wealth.
My child ! my child ! give me King Herod's oath.
Let me appoint the tenor of thy claim
And I am fed, refreshed, clothed, and consoled.

SALOME.

Nay, plead not thou to me : I plead to thee,
If I with filial courtesy may dare,
Nor, not obedient, disobedient seem ;
For I am straitened, know not how to turn,
Nor may deny, nor yet unperjured give.
There is a promise weighing on my soul,
Which I alone can lift with counterpoise
Of Herod's weighty oath.

HERODIAS.

Thy mother prayeth ;
Weigh'st thou thy promise against thy mother's prayer ?
Come, let me frame thy quest, straightway thou make it
While wine yet firmly holdeth wreathèd vines

Upon the eyes of Reason, and before
The weather of the royal mood shall change
From fair to foul. Thy bow of beauty bendeth
In odour-bearing clouds from misty bowls
About King Herod's head, and while he drinketh
Deep generosity and is a god
Omnipotent to give or to refuse,
He will unquestioning grant thy request.

SALOME.

This once, my mother, let me conquer thee
In pleading.

HERODIAS.

Nay, drive not from thee my love
Withstanding me. It is a thing alone,
A mother's love, without successor ; dead,
Or fled, 'tis gone, and gone 'tis gone for aye.
There is not in the whole world of human loves
That which dare enter in to light the dark
And haunted void where lieth its sepulchre.
Such is my love ; although, perchance, I have seemed
Cold and unloving, leaving thee alone
In Nature's school to have thy qualities
Spring and increase of their uncultured strength.
Believe not I have loved thee less, nor think
I have not laboured constantly for thee.
What but my love caused thee to learn the art
Which in itself concentrates every art
By woman found ; which flasheth more than wit,
Enkindleth blood more than the burning eye
Half hid in heavy lids, as fire in smoke ;

Inviteth more than smiles, than sighs enthralleth ;
Enchaineth reason more than linkèd words,
And lifteth tossing hearts more than the waves
Of love-moved, undulating melodies ;
Which teacheth modesty to calculate,
And how conceal the least, the most display
Full ripened treasures of the Hesperides
Which she, in scarlet armour, gently guardeth ;
How hottest make imagination burn,
And from cold vacancy forge glowing charms ;
But, chiefly, teacheth timid modesty
How best to hide her blushing self from view ;
The art which now hath safely, quickly led
Thy beauty to a bloodless victory
Worthy an emperor and bloody fields,
The conquest of a king, a royal oath,
In worth a diadem, which thou wouldst lose
Through my supineness——

SALOME.

Mother !

HERODIAS.

Peace ! my child.

I do not blame thee for't ; thou dost not know
The attributes of him whom thou wouldst save.
Thou know'st not how to chain thy heart's impulse
With chilling links of speculation, forged
From reason cold ; nor yet hast learned the trick
To balance judgment on the silvery point
Of interest. Such wisdom cometh later ;
But thou mayst take it from me in thy youth.

'Tis a full hour to midnight : half of that
I would commune with thee to inspire time
Which else will sluggishly forget to move.
Come, let me teach thee life-craft.

SALOME.

I would live
Uncraftily with justice and my conscience.

HERODIAS.

Talk not of what thou dost not understand.
Pretext is justice, conscience prejudice.
Thou art ignorant ; I have work for thee to do
And must instruct thee ; it is now high time,
For with thine opening buds thou shouldst begin
To exhale the power of woman, feel the joys
Of power.

SALOME.

The power to love and be beloved
Is all I ask.

HERODIAS.

The power to curse thyself
By yielding every power but this and this
Is weakness. Thou art strong when thou art loved,
For then thou rulest ; weak when thou dost love,
For then thou art ruled. Lead for thy purposes
The passions and the appetites, the loves
And hates, the weaknesses and strengths which move
And master men ; but love them not. Their love,
Make it an engine built against themselves,

And batter them ; the missiles which they send
Burn not on thine own hearth for warmth, but cast
them

Envenomed back. What's sense of love compared
With sense of sway, the tyranny of will ?
Then conquer, conquer all that charms may win,
A conquest not to be enjoyed but used,
And doubly thus enjoyed in double use.

SALOME.

Naught would I wish to win, all would I give
From him who loveth me and to him I love.
I know no use of love save to be shrined.

HERODIAS.

Lift now thy spirit to a hate sublime
And feel the subtlest essence of all joys.

SALOME.

I cannot feel a greater joy than feel
That whom I love doth love me perfectly.

HERODIAS.

What are to thee the joys of womanhood
As felt by common women ? Thou shouldst be
So mighty in thy strength of intellect,
So cunning of intent, so stern of will,
That thou mayst handle beauty and thy wits
As if they were another's : let them be
The mercenary hosts of force supreme,
The might of woman's soul cut from the clogs
Of her soft nature, weaknesses of sex,

Shame, tenderness, and pity pitiful,
Susceptibility to love and mourn,
By trenchant steel of her self-tempered will.

SALOME.

Mourning affection convalescent is,
Love grief's forerunner : I would love and mourn.

HERODIAS.

Nay, hear me. Coax to loving strength-proud men
And, to make sure success, draw them apart
And deal with them alone ; for they are safe
Surrounded by thy sex, as is the sun
Surrounded by the stars whose mutual bonds
Hold him in place and from the power of each.
And when the fools are to an ambush drawn
Drive barbèd torments through their writhing hearts,
Sharp, racking pains and marrow-burning fires,
And tear by pieces Reason from his throne.

SALOME.

So might a fiend do, but a woman never.

HERODIAS.

Tempt, tempt, yea tempt always, for men aye love
Temptation more than that which tempteth them.
Let nothing tempt thee save desire to tempt.
And be thou then temptation varièd
In fashion ever new ; yet screen thyself
With soft repulses like a coan robe.
Yet so thou be temptation thou must be
Never fruition ; therefore thou must be

A Proteus in thy skill to escape and change
Thy seeming, with a syren's voice and lures.
Be sparkling wine up mounting on the brim,
Receding ever from the eager lips.
Be full ripe fruit outbursting to the taste
And trembling on its stem, yet never fall,
Still bending more and more with luscious weight
Yet never bending to the hungry grasp,
More and more tangible, yet never touched.

SALOME.

The gods permit no monster such as this.

HERODIAS.

Let hope be sharpened by uncertainties,
Possession by anticipation held.
Fetter thy breath and make it come and go
With limping, laboured gait and bear thy blood
To feed responsive fires in either cheek.
Seem to be all things but that which thou art,
And seem to seem not, all unconscious seem.
Ruling herself a woman may rule all
If she of seeming know the perfect use.
She maketh wisest fools, the strongest slaves,
And from the tallest heads lifteth their crowns.
She writeth legislator's laws ; unseen
Upon the judgment-seat maketh decrees,
Dealeth death punishments to the accused unheard,
And sharpeneth dull executioners.

SALOME.

I fear I understand thee, yet do not.

HERODIAS.

Thou shalt remember passion is the fire
Promethean which giveth life to love.
And thou shalt light this fire with flashes stolen
From heaven.

SALOME.

And shackled have my vitals torn
Without remission as a punishment,
Or be consumed by what I would control
Not knowing how to seize and master it.

HERODIAS.

Well, then, remember love is the treasure-house
Of kings, passion the fire which breaketh in.
Thence kindle it ; but see that thou dost do it
Like an incendiary in the dark
With torch of glowing posture slyly put,
Its glare half hid by false unconsciousness,
Or hooded flame of burning, down-cast looks ;
Or let the spark thrown off from rising lids
Be borne to ready tinder by a sigh ;
And let the breast in crescent brilliance gleam
Forth of its cloudy screen from time to time
As 'twere by accident ; and when the flames
Possess the treasury, its owner crazed
In wild confusion turning impotent,
Then shalt thou draw his royal treasures out,
His oaths, his gifts, his powers of life and death,
But, best of all, the power of safe revenge.

SALOME.

Revenge is never safe ; I would it flee
As the dread Hydra.

HERODIAS.

What ! Thou knowest it ?

SALOME.

I have heard it pictured. In the wastes of hell
Where from their ashen sources ooze the floods
Which stretch their waveless, slime-envenomed length
Through direful regions of the nether world,
With crawling horrors to their surface filled
Which glare with eyes that wink not, fixed and fell ;
Where dreadful forests cast terrific shade
And move and mutter as the shrouded dead
When they walk forth ; where clammy vapours brood,
Hatching distempers, while through their dim shapes
Serpents with flaming eyes, slow moving, trail
Dull lightnings, gloating terrors formless writhe,
And lost winds standing voiceless gasp for breath,
There is a cave, mid black, blood-dripping cliffs
And overhanging crags and shelving ledge,
Of tenfold darkness, where no light of day
Can penetrate. There, on the bitter flood,
A horrid monster dwelleth aspic-formed.
At each extremity a hideous head
Hot hisses uttereth with fiery breath
Which lighteth momentarily the fetid lair ;
And on each creeping scale a poisonous spine
Aye moveth and emitteth burning juice.

While seeking prey it batteneth on itself,
Swelleth and festereth ; feeding on its prey
Groweth a lean, self-stinging skeleton,
Then gnaweth madly and fatteneth on itself.
This monster is Revenge ; it biteth both ways
And stingeth with each spine. So I have been told.

HERODIAS.

It is a doting nurse's marvellous tale
To frighten children. Thou, my child, shouldst be
No child of common stuff. Thou shalt have wrongs.
Woman, with all her power, shall suffer wrongs ;
Betrayal, scorn, neglect, indifference,
The mockery of those whom she would mock,
Greater deceit of those she would deceive.
For there be some whom Mercury himself
Teacheth to steal the semblances of fools
To fool us with ; Hyperion's eloquence
And Orpheus' lyre, to lure us from our wiles,
While, in Achilles' armour, they are safe.
And when they have pilfered all our precious things
They leave our laps with woven net and bars,
Like Hebrew Sampson, on unconscious locks.

SALOME.

I would not mock, nor yet would I deceive.
I would no wiles have, weave no web for flies ;
Let that which winneth hold fast all my gain.
I would give all, would shear no manly locks,
But be Minerva's shield to him I love,
And shelter him with truth, guarding his breast
Forever faithful in my faithful arms.

HERODIAS.

Thine inexperience is spiritless
And fermentation lacketh, like new wine.
The action of the world will ripen it
Till 't shall intoxicate thee, as strong drink.
All women do deceive ; all are deceived ;
And thou, betraying, yet shall be betrayed.
The duper duped can never more forgive :
Then let there be for thee in the whole reach
Of nature but one hunger, but one thirst,
One rest, one thought, one hope, one joy, revenge ;
One weariness, one sorrow, one distress,
One agony, the absence of revenge.
Thou has not savoured yet the thrilling sweets
Which lie like honey in the scarlet cup
Of full-blown rancor ; yet it is a taste
Which raiseth thee to gods, and thou becomest
Partaker of their joys, since their chief joy
Is vengeance.

SALOME.

'Tis a fearful thing ; the gods,
Omniscient, never err. What seemeth to us,
Seeing but feebly part of the whole act,
As vengeance may be purest justice. I
Would rather leave all vengeance with the Furies,
Nor wish to mount to that too dangerous height.

HERODIAS.

What ! Art thou without soul ? What ! Art thou base ?
What ! Hath my blood to slavish water turned,
To creep in sluggish currents through thy veins ?

I thought thee formed of metal different
And tempered with a temper different.
I thought thy mounting pride was such, when struck,
Instead of sparks, like pride of common souls,
'Twould give forth flames far-reaching to devour.
'Tis thy young nature which hath not its strength.
Come, let me heighten it with this hot kiss
And breathe strong fervour into thy fireless heart.
My knowledge shall transform thee as the taste
Of fruit forbidden on the mythic tree
And make thee wiser ; yea, this night shalt thou
Become a woman. Bend, and let me bind
A woman's stinging wisdom cropped from griefs
Upon thy brow, and with this close embrace
Burn all emotion from thy girlish breast
Save only one, the joy of hate, revenge.

SALOME.

Wherefore should I seek vengeance ? Whom avenge ?
No one hath wronged me ;—'tis a fearful word,
Revenge ! I love it not ; pray talk not of it !

HERODIAS.

We love the name of whatsoe'er we love,
We love to talk of whatsoe'er we love,
We love to lose ourselves in what we love :
So do I love that sweetest name revenge,
So love to talk of that sweet thing revenge,
So love to lose myself in sweet revenge.
Thy mother's wrongs, are they not then thine own ?
Come nearer me ; come here beneath this light,
That I may see thee blanch and sink away

In a simoom of pestilential words
Called up from silent wastes of womanhood.
Then shall a vengeance be aroused in thee
Will not discriminate nor satiate be.

SALOME.

Alas !

HERODIAS.

Call me not from these ruins drear,
The palaces and gardens of my youth,
With thy soft voice. Here pleasures dead abide
In ghostly silence ; memories here croak
Forebodings sinister. Speak not but hear.
I loved thy sire while I was still a child,
Ere yet a sixteenth time the circling orb
In annual voyage had borne me in its arms
Up to the summer solstice, where the sun
Stoppeth in middle course to embrace and bless
His planets coming home from wandering.
Thy father was Apollo in his prime,
As glorious in beauty as the star
Which leadeth ruddy Aurora up the steeps
And ordereth the procession of the morn.
Of noblest race was he, a very prince,
Whose noble soul was nobler than his race.
A prince in strength, a prince in bravery,
In honour, tenderness, and love a king.
There is no manly virtue was not his,
No manly gentleness that was not his.
I know not if I loved him, for I doubt
If love be so inconstant ; but there was

A fever in my blood more fierce than love.
In its delirium I saw but him,
In all the noisy world I heard but him,
In dreams and thought I thought and dreamed of him.

SALOME.

Ah, thou didst love him, love him truly, mother.

HERODIAS.

And had he never torn himself from me
He still would be my thought, my dream, my life,
And they all pure and noble as that self.
But I forget, and thus forgetting loose
My hold convulsive on forgetfulness.—
A twelvemonth we were wedded ; thou wert born.
Before thy little lips could speak his name
He led his loving veterans to the wars.
His couriers, slain, brought me no messages,
And absence cooled my fever. Ere a year
Seductive Herod, with his Orphean tongue,
Had drawn my restless thoughts and heart to him,
A kingly villain in a god-like form.
I took him to the holiest recess
Of my young life and gave its secrets up,
And to that self did give mine honour up,
The honour of my lord, to prove my love,
And, in my madness, thought that in his care
'Twas fourfold honour. So he guarded it
As might a thief the treasures of a realm.
He paid my trust with bitter treachery ;
He paid my warmest love with coldest scorn ;
And for mine honour gave me infamy.

And when he had sacked my goodly character,
And pillaged from its temple's treasury
My woman's jewels, which he flung away,
He mocked me, girl, he mocked me, dost thou hear?
He mocked me, mocked me to my face, dost hear?
And cast me from him burdened with a gage
Of love, dishonour, treachery and shame.

SALOME.

Nay, mother, spare me. All thy flashing words
Rush down as thunderbolts upon my soul
And blast me. Spare thy child !

HERODIAS.

Nay, thou must hear.
Thy father left the army on its march,
Unlooked for, unattended, stood in Rome.
Else had he never seen the accursèd proof
Of more accursèd guilt, prince Herod's child
And mine. He saw and learned the damning fact,
But saw not me ; then fled Alcmaeon-like.
Men said the furies seemed to follow him
And that he sought and bravely found through death
A refuge from them in oblivion.
I never saw him more ; perchance he died,
For he had loved me better than his life,
Better than all save honour ; yet I have heard
Through soldiers wandering from far distant fields
Of deeds wrought by one hand, always the same,
Which could be his alone.

SALOME.

My father liveth !

He liveth ! Doth he live ?

HERODIAS.

I was the scorn

Of Roman matrons and of Roman men,
And such king Herod made me, dost thou hear ?
I, in a moment's frenzy, seized that child,
As if it were the cause of all my woe,
And strangled it.

SALOME.

O horror ! O ! alas !

Most speechless horror !

HERODIAS.

Then I had it said

That I had overlaid it in my sleep ;
And Herod, this king Herod was the cause.
At length I roused me, as a lioness
Riseth to avenge her wounds and slaughtered whelps.
Yet stealthily I wrought, nor wrought in vain.
King Herod's brother Philip, through my craft,
By engine and embankment of my siege,
Was overcome and ceded to my power.
And thus this goodly castle I obtained
That from its vantage ground I might assail
King Herod's self. But boots it not to tell
By what enchantment, while yet Philip's wife,
I brought king Herod grovelling to my feet.

And there I kept him chained ; for I had vowed
By all the infernal and supernal gods
To be avenged as never a woman was.
Therefore I bound him by a fearful oath
To be my husband ; Philip in the way,
So much the worse for Philip ; he was moved,
That as king Herod's wife without recess
I might occasion watch for my revenge
And seize it ere it slipped. Nor need was there
Of oaths, for to the core I had him fired
With passion, and I held him in the heat
Till I should be his wife. Thus Philip's fate,
Not wrought by me alone—nay, start not, nay,
I told thee thou shouldst know thy mother's soul
And pale and wither in the baleful light
Of that fell knowledge—I would strangle thee
If thou shouldst stand betwixt me and revenge.

SALOME.

Let me go hence.

HERODIAS.

Remain and listen—peace !
But when the king would take me for his wife
John Baptist, whom alone he greatly feareth,
Forbade him, and he wavered ; then I vowed
That I would silence John the Baptist ; yea,
If he had been a god I would have done it.
Calmly I held the king within my grasp,
Nor eased his fever till I was his queen,
And this bold John the Baptist put in ward.
I hasted not to my revenge lest haste

Should overrun itself ; but thread by thread
I have woven imperceptible my web.
Now the last thread is drawn ; let them escape
Who can. And thou—this night king Herod's eyes
Were windows for his passions to look through,
And they, too eager, they betrayed themselves.

SALOME.

Oh ! let me go !

HERODIAS.

I swear that thou shalt stay.
Thou hast withdrawn his wanton thoughts from me.
I tell thee he is mine, and he shall be,
To torture with infernal jealousies,
Than which the eumenides or gods of hell
Can find no sharper torment ; he is mine
Till I deliver him to furies. She
Who weakeneth admiration in his heart,
And looseneth thus my vengeful hold on him,
Cannot escape my wrath and punishment.
I'll make him hate thee, scorn thee and detest,
I'll make thee feel the royning of remorse,
I'll plant regrets prolific in thy heart,
Poison thy springs of life ; and on the king
Will bring the vengeance of the eternal gods.
For he shall break his oath and perjured lie
Or, me avenging, take John Baptist's life ;
Who, though he seem a man, full well I know
Is from the gods, subject to human power,
Subject to woes and mortal sufferings,
To the agony of death, and he shall feel it.

H

If e'er there was aught tenderer in his heart
For me than scorn 'twas pity. Yet I loved,
I loved him to a frenzy, and I sought
To win his love. His youthful majesty,
His god-like form, his towering loftiness,
His soul that naught could reach, no power could bend,—
Not all my charms could fire his quiet look,
Not such seductions as have maddened Jove.
The more he scorned and chastened me with words
The more I loved, the more I bent and prayed.
And when I saw that prayers could naught avail,
Nor wealth of beauty bribe, nor tears could melt,
That I could not possess him, then I swore
None other should ; I hated him.

SALOME.

Alas !

HERODIAS.

And now I will avenge me as a god
With one sweet blow, and that shall fall on thee,
On John the Baptist, and upon the king.
Yea, also on myself. Yet 'tis a pain
So sublimed in its infernal kind
To curse thee utterly, mine only child,
That it is sister to the joys of heaven.
Thus I through thee, will be fourfold avenged.
The hour is come.

SALOME.

There is a holy nymph,
Daughter of Love and Pity, dwelling high

In heaven fast by the throne and judgment-seat
Keeping the book of Justice, who is blind.
The majesty of God envelopeth her,
And from her face beameth benignity.
Of all the forms in heaven hers, the most fair,
Is most approved by all the heavenly host,
Whence Punishment, Revenge, and Hate were chased
With all their howling train to Tartarus.
Her angels watch from the high battlements
To find occasion for her offices.
Her messengers fly home with sighs and tears,
Gathered from penitential groves and keeps,
And prayers which tremble under weights of woe.
Amid the perfume-bearing trees that bloom
Behind the throne, a screen from rays too bright,
She garnereth them in her strong treasure-house,
A grotto built of pearl and emerald,
Of amethyst and sapphire, chrysolite,
Chalcedony, sardonyx, topaz, beryl,
And chrysoprasus, jacinth, sardius ;
The source whence flow rivers of life, and come
The balmy breezes of eternal health :
Her name Forgiveness is.

HERODIAS.

Who taught thee this ?

SALOME.

John Baptist.

HERODIAS.

Ha ! I see rebellion rise !

The gods do so to me and more also

If I forgive ! Thou shalt obey me. Up !
And in the royal presence make this prayer—
Yet stay !—Yea, written ; it were better so.
I will not trust thee now to seek the king.
Alarm might turn thee from thy chartered course
Or, wilful, thou mightst mar my perfect plan.
Thy timid words might die of terror ere
They reached the king. I will contrive a way
To make thy tabled suit acceptable
As if thou offeredst it on bended knee.
Take now these tablets, write as I shall say :
“To thee, great king, king Herod, peace and health.
If it so please thy gracious majesty
With royal condescension to discharge
Thy royal oath, hear now thy handmaid’s prayer :
Presently after midnight let me have,
Upon a charger, John the Baptist’s head.”

SALOME.

Nay !

HERODIAS.

Ha ! what aileth thee ? Hath that Gorgon name
Turned thee to petrification ? Do I bear
Medusa’s head, that thus thy stony gaze
Without intelligence is fixed on me ?

SALOME.

Say thou art not my mother and content
I will be motherless.

HERODIAS.

Nay, sit thee down !

What ! shrink’st thou from me ? Wherefore ? Sit thee
down

And listen. Thou art but a child ; 'tis fit
Thine inexperience should start aside
At a strange sound, like colts untrained for war.

SALOME.

Nay, thou hast made me woman ; no more child
I still as child am ready to obey
Thy just commands in all things. But in this—
To imbrue my hands in blood of a good man,
To black my soul with vile ingratitude,
To curse myself with sacrilegious crime,
Never ! I swear it——

HERODIAS.

Perjure not thyself,
Since it is useless. Listen yet a while
Before thou swearest. Thou lovest Sextus still.
When now I sought thee camest thou to me
From his embrace ;—ay, blush, and thou wert fain
By Herod's oath this night to franchise thee
From my displeasure and my hinderance.
Thou still canst do it. Write as I have said
And thou mayst wed with Sextus ; none shall dare
To let thee.

SALOME.

I will not strike hands with shame
To purchase for myself a life of joy.
Thou know'st well how to tempt, knowing the worth
Of such a love as Sextus'. O relent !
I am thy daughter.

HERODIAS.

So was she who died

By these most beauteous hands—these tender hands—
Which still are strong enough to strangle thee.
And they shall do it, or thou shalt obey.
Quick ! Make thy choice and write.

SALOME.

Nay ! I can die.

Death is the friend of those who are in pain,
And by the tortured ever standeth near
To take them from the rack.

HERODIAS.

Ha ! think'st thou so ?

I'll undeceive thee ; for I'll make death stand
With sightless caverns and infernal grin
And skinny fingers clasped upon thy throat
To threaten and to torture thee himself
Without salvation.

SALOME.

Him I fear not.

HERODIAS.

Gods !

But thou art woman ; I will touch the quick.
Thy lover in the garden waiteth thee.
Before, behind, beside him ambushed lie
Men who are ordered, at a given sign,
When from the window I shall show this light,
To fall upon him, strike him to the heart.

Aha ! thou waverest now and turnest pale.
What ! those bold roses flee thy cheeks at length ?
And red rebellion hangeth flags of truce
On thy defiant lips ?

SALOME.

Spare him ! Alas !

HERODIAS.

Finish the writing, sign, and he is safe.
Refuse and, by the immortal gods I swear,
He dieth.

SALOME.

Alas !

HERODIAS.

Ay, weep. Ay, wring thy hands.
When tears thou wring'st from them I will relent.

SALOME.

I cannot see him die.

HERODIAS.

Haste, haste and write.
This lamp, shown to the angry rising wind
From that near window, will not out so quick
As shall his flickering life.

SALOME.

Have pity.

HERODIAS.

Write.

SALOME.

I ask not mercy for myself but him.
Let him escape, I——

HERODIAS.

Write.

SALOME.

O take my life,
Let it appease thy vengeance.

HERODIAS.

Write.

SALOME.

Alas !

HERODIAS.

Three steps will bring me to the window. Write,
Or in one moment it will be too late.

SALOME.

Will naught avail me ?

HERODIAS.

Write.

SALOME.

The gods forgive.
I know not what to do, nor what I do.

HERODIAS.

Nay, write it plainly.

SALOME.

Ah !

HERODIAS.

What aileth thee ?

SALOME.

Ah !

HERODIAS.

What seest thou ? Turn thy glassy eye—speak ; speak !

SALOME.

As I inscribed his name a cold bright flame
Followed my hand !

HERODIAS.

Thou art mad ! Finish and seal.

SALOME.

My arm refuseth its accustomed work.
My hand cannot put seal and signature ;
There is no sense in it—I cannot see.

HERODIAS.

Then will I guide it, sign and seal for thee.
Ay, sink unconscious ; thou canst bend at length.
I will so leave thee while I use thy strength.

IV.

A MOUNTAIN OVERLOOKING JERUSALEM.

ANTONIUS. AN AGED JEW.

ANTONIUS.

No constancy save of inconstancy
And the persistent, damnèd, strenuous sprite
The in-haunting mocker, mocking memory.
Why, slumber even, which used to drudge all night
Fitting new soles to the worn sandal life,
Hath now become unstable in her moods
As ever a woman, widow, wife, or maid,
And will naught do for me but by caprice ;
And then she taketh stitches two or three
To keep together soul and body, patch
Worn expectation, strengthen misery,
As smiling women deftly darn and knot
Hopes which are breaking, so that they may pull
Them more entirely from the tortured heart.
The solemn hour is nigh when eve and morn,
Progenitors of night, shall separate.—
Old man, what dost thou here? Eh? Fearest thou not
The imminent storm? Full-armed clouds toss and pitch
As ghostly triremes on an ebon sea ;

The struggling winds like drowning navies cry.
The elements of nature enfevered are,
In most delirious and ill-omened state.

AGED JEW.

Languish thy children in chains, thou at ease in the arms
of the spoiler !
Strangers have gone to thy bed, and the heathen from far
have defiled thee ;
Daughters have witnessed thy shame, and thy sons, they
cannot avenge thee.
Rend thy fair garment and wail, yea, howl for the shame
that is on thee.
Where be thy men trained for war ? Where, where be
thy chariots and horses ?
Where be thy reverend feasts and the chanting tribes
that come to them ?
Where be thy prophets who ruled, and thy psalmists
expert in sweet music ?
Where be thy princes enthroned, anointed and crowned
by thy prophets ?
Herbage far rolling like seas groweth red in the blood of
thine armies,
Under incarnadine waves lie vanquished their mouldering
corpses.
Neigh of thy horses is heard as they look from the land
of the stranger,
Longing with pain for their vales and the hands that once
fed and caressed them.
Groans of thy chariots sound ; they are dragging unwilling
against thee

Driven by hands that are dyed in the blood of thy
children to crush thee.

Spread are thy reverend feasts, but eaten are they by thy
foemen.

Chanting tribes gather no more, but conquering bands of
the gentiles.

Prophets instruct thee no more, but threatening signs in
the heavens ;

Prophets shall rule thee no more, but the sons of unhal-
lowed oppressors.

Psalmists with weeping are mute, and their hearts with
their harps have been broken ;

Mistily seated on clouds they shed mournful tears on thy
temple.

Fettered thy princes and sore with the servitude heavy
upon them ;

Sighs and complainings are heard from them like the
moaning of waters.

Slain is the bright morning Star, yea, dark-wandering
planets have pierced him ;

Blood from his lacerate heart poureth torrents of wrath
on thy dwellings.

Lift up thy voice for the woes, the captivity coming
upon thee ;

Weep and bewail for the days when the captive shall
seem to thee blessèd.

ANTONIUS.

Thou answerest not. These portents, these strange
sounds

Which are like voices speaking in the air,
Dost thou not heed them ?

AGED JEW.

I remark them well.

If thou dost fear them go, leave me in peace.
I would unravel their mysterious sense.
I came at even-tide, as is my wont,
To meditate, and mourn our glories dead.
That glorious city is their monument ;
And, if I read aright these boding signs,
It soon shall be their silent sepulchre.
Mark well her bulwarks, note her gilded towers—
City of beauty, joy of the whole earth,
How hath thy song to sound of weeping turned !
How desolate ! Put up thy hands and weep,
Yea, wail and mourn, thou Rachel comfortless !

A VOICE.

Woe ! woe !
There be two woes ;
Now cometh the first woe !
The dragon tendeth to the earth !
His wings o'ershadow it, he ruleth the hour !
A time and time and half a time the second woe,
The woe of woes, the woe devouring every woe shall come.
Woe ! woe !

PRINCE OF THE POWERS OF THE AIR.

Arouse the thunders, bid them mount their car
And drive till farthest earth's foundations jar.
Uncage tornados, let them raven forth ;
Unfetter winds from West, South, East and North ;
Loose from their icy prisons freezing storms ;
Let midnight terrors take their cloudy forms ;

Let airy archers shoot their meteor flight ;
Let flames tartarean blaze in northern night ;
Let lightnings suit their serpent shapes on high ;
Let blackest horror cover earth and sky ;
Let each with each contend, and all with all ;
Let Chaos reign and Anarchy appall.

ANTONIUS.

The gods preserve us ! What might be that voice ?—
The elements are cursed with lunacy !

A VOICE FROM THE FAR HEIGHTS.

Hither come up ; enter thy rich reward.

AGED JEW.

See ! from the donjon keep to heaven ascend
Horses and chariot of flaming fire !

PRINCE OF THE POWERS OF THE DEPTHS.

Let central seas mount up and lash the pole ;
Let polar oceans on each other roll ;
Let fiery surges to the surface rise,
Upheave the land and scorch the shuddering skies ;
Let streams infernal rive the solid rocks
And stagger serried mountains with their shocks,
Rush overwhelming torrents through the wound,
Consume the fleeing air and pall the ground ;
Let tenfold darkness leaving realms of night
Devour the firmamental orbs of light ;
Let all commix, confound, contend with all ;
Let Chaos reign and Anarchy appall.

A VOICE.

Blood ! blood !
A sound of storms ! A sound of coming vengeance !
Sounds of wrath !
The clouds are crimson ! Mists arise all red with blood !
The heavy clusters ripe are dropping blood !
The groaning press is sweating blood !
The grapes of wrath are pressed !
The press o'erfloweth !
Blood ! blood !

AGED JEW.

O Lord, defend us in the day of trouble ;
O Lord, have pity in the day of wrath !
Terrors take hold on us ; who can withstand,
Who, who can stand against Thine awful might ?
In mercy save the remnant which remaineth ;
Destroy not utterly. Shall Shiloh come
In vain ? Shall the Messiah appear and find
No welcome ? None to bend the knee ? No throne ?
Remember all thy promises, O Lord.
Save, save thy chosen, turn their hearts, O Lord,
For David's and thy servant Samuel's sake,
For Moses' sake, whom thou didst ever regard.

ANTONIUS.

The shaking earth forbiddeth me to stand,
Darkness to see, thunders and winds to hear !
Speak ! Say thou livest !

AGED JEW.

I am living still.

Lord God hath uttered His voice and the earth hath
heard it affrighted.
Tempests are fleeing away to escape from His terrible
presence ;
Mountains are melting to fire, and valleys to fiery rivers,
Stars leaping headlong from heaven to hide in the
shadows of chaos.
Fearful in majesty and justice the Almighty Lord God
of Sabaoth.
Flasheth the spear in His hand through His awful
pavilion of darkness.
Arrows like falling suns gleam from the canopy darkly
about Him.
Lightnings descend from His brows, and wide-spreading
flames are His sandals.
Rivers are dried by His tread and oceans rolled back to
their caverns.
Thunders the noise of His footsteps o'erstriding 'twixt
worlds the abysses ;
Falling His feet on the orbs they quake with the might
of His going.
Sound of the seas is His voice and the roaring of
numberless waters.
Source of the light is His front, and His frown covereth
nations with darkness.
Judgment hath made its decree ; all the people are
weighed in the balance.
Mercy hath stoppèd her ears, and can now no more be
entreated.
Vengeance hath lifted the sword, it goeth not bright to
the scabbard.
Cedars of Lebanon come and bow themselves down for
embankments.

Trenches about the city! Ah! trenches with blood
overflowing!
Braying of trumpets and cymbals, of war the terrible
engines!
Neighing of steeds and a shouting! noises of captains
and horsemen!
Groanings of trodden on dying! wailings of children and
warriors!
Outcries of pestilence ravening! yarring of famine
devouring!
Voices of prayers unavailing! cries as of women in
travail!
Voices of mothers bewailing, blessing the wombs that
are barren!
Flames! flames! flames in the Temple! Defiled is the
Holy of Holies!
Voices of Silence and Death dominating the desolate
city!

ANTONIUS.

In such a tumult would I were a god!
Fall down, ye heavens, yea, tumble, roar and crash;
Drive earthquakes trembling from their central caves!
Rage, rend, ye cloudy furies, venom spew!
And thou magnificent and black abyss
Which yawnest over me, disgorge thy floods,
And blow thy fiery breath; thou gaping earth
Shut up thy ponderous rock-toothed jaws and crunch
Cities and forests, and embowel them
In thy huge carcase; howl, and storm, and shriek,
Ye elements, in internecine strife!
I would that I might mingle in your broils,

As one of ye, and ease my stormy soul.
But I, so strong in weakness, weak in strength,
Can make no greater storm in which to whelm
Mine own. How impotent am I ! how small !
These portents bode some evil to the state,
Or to these dogged and rebellious Jews.
Naught bodeth ill to me. I am so ill
In mine estate that I a portent am
Unto myself, but can no evil find
Sufficient to surcease mine endless ills.

V.

GARDEN OF THE PALACE.

SEXTUS.

SEXTUS.

AH me! She cometh not! Four cruel hours,
In livery of hope, have held me racked
On expectation, straining nerve from nerve,
Till all the thews and sinews of my mind
Are well-nigh broken, and I shall go mad.
The terrors of this strange, terrific night
Have moved me less than what I fear for her.
Why cometh not? Morn openeth her eyes,
Awakened by forerunners of the day,
And through the western curtains of her couch
Looketh inertly; wingèd messengers
With clarion voice proclaim through all the world
Her early rising. My love cometh not,
And while she tarrieth all is night to me.
Why not? Why not? Impatience, work thy will,
And chase anxiety, which more tormenteth.
Strange fears affright me which I fear to express.
If rumour be not all compound of lies
The queen is merciless. In ignorance

I impotently grope, with none to guide
My hands to pillars of uncertainty,
That I might throw them with a giant's grasp
And in their ruins slaughter all the doubts
Which worry and torture me. Why cometh not?

Enter Salome.

Ah ! she is there ! Ye gods ! how changed ! As like
Her former self as blight to blossom. Love,
What hast thou done ? What hath been done to thee ?
Where hast thou been ? Nay, speak to me, my life !
What hast thou seen ? Thy hands are cold, thy heart
Is almost still. Have terrors of this night
Chilled thee with horror ? froze the founts of life ?
Driven lips' speech to thine enfettered eyes
And held it captive there forced to proclaim
The one sense, horror, horror, horror ? Speak !
Yea, weep, and moan, and sigh and tremble ; weep,
And let thy tears dissolve the icy bonds
Which bind thy tongue and chain thy struggling heart

SALOME.

O Sextus !

SEXTUS.

Why these tears, these sobs and sighs
Which would wreck navies ? Weep and ease thy heart
Of overshadowing clouds ; but let some words
Come to the shore not drowned to make me know
Why thou dost moan, what the disaster, how
To succour thee.

SALOME.

Alas !

SEXTUS.

This telleth naught
But that the weather is rough, the which I knew.
There, there ; weep freely resting on my breast,
As, rescued, on a beach the shipwrecked lie
While briny seas flow from them. Speak, my love.

SALOME.

The gods pursue me !

SEXTUS.

Thou art dreaming, child.

SALOME.

Hast thou not seen their bolts this awful night ?

SEXTUS.

But they were not for thee ; the Jewish state
Hath now outlived the patience of the gods
And they do threaten it.

SALOME.

Nay, it is I ;
They threaten me, and I am undone ! 'Tis just.

SEXTUS.

Whence this wild terror driving hence thy sense,
Thy reason, trust, affection, yea thyself
From this sweet palace of thy beauteous flesh
And dwelling ruthless there where thou hast been,
Like satyr in a city ravaged ?

SALOME.

O Sextus, let me weep, nor question me.
I dare not answer thee, for trust hath fled,
And anguish driveth courage from the field.

SEXTUS.

Salome, dost thou then distrust me? Thou!

SALOME.

I did not say so, Sextus—did I say it?
I know not what I say, I am fordone!
To save thee I have lost thee.

SEXTUS.

Lost me? Nay!
Thou canst not lose me; thee will I not lose.

SALOME.

I am already lost.

SEXTUS.

The storm hath darked
Thy pole star, reason, and thou wanderest.

SALOME.

O Sextus, curse me not; my shattered bark
Is sinking now with woe; not one hour tried
Under my guidance when the tempest came
Out of a summer sky on summer seas,
And it is wrecked and driven so far, so far
On furious oceans it can ne'er return

But now must drift alone till I am engulfed,
Striving in vain to steer my way to haven.

SEXTUS.

Salome, leave this mystic phrase and speak
In plain, unstudied words that which thou meanest.

SALOME.

Let me withdraw myself while strength remaineth,
Nor make me make thee chase me from thy breast,
That thou mayst weep for me and not abhor.

SEXTUS.

Dost thou mistrust me when I should be strong,
But trustest me in weakness? Do me not
This wrong to my poor manhood. I could wield
Great Neptune's trident to put down the waves,
At thy command, and drive the hostile winds
Back to their caves, and bar them pinioned there.
I'll be thy cure; thy childish brain is crazed!

SALOME.

Yea, I am crazed: think but that I am crazed,
And that my hurried words are only clouds
From a distempered sea and let them pass.
This night indeed hath been an awful night,
And fearful things were heard; but fearfulest,
Unseen, unfelt, unheard, except by me,
The mysteries horrible which force me hence.

SEXTUS.

Thou wouldst not go from me again?

SALOME.

I must !

SEXTUS.

Whither ?

SALOME.

I cannot tell ; but I no more
Shall see thee.

SEXTUS.

Oh ! thou provest me to know
How much I love thee.

SALOME.

I would keep thy love,
Therefore I part from thee. I could even bear,
If time and purpose might excuse, to lift
A suicidal hand against myself ;
But cannot bear this fond desire I feel
To tell thee all should crucify thy fondness,—
Nay, nay, I cannot ! Love me always, Sextus !

SEXTUS.

I will, I will, I will. 'Tis said caprice
Doth woman rule ; I know it hath no place
In thee, but that thou art moved by subtle cause.
Then let me see it ; I will run it through,
And with a thrust of reason take its life.

SALOME.

Could I make known all I have heard and seen,
Could I disclose to thee all I have done,
And yet not drive thee shuddering from my side,

I would, while weeping tears of gratitude
For such relief.

SEXTUS.

Naught can drive me from thee.

SALOME.

I have come to say farewell, and my poor heart
Is breaking. Tell me not how thou wouldst guard,
Guide, shelter, aid and love me, or, alas !
I cannot leave thee.

SEXTUS.

And thou never shalt !

SALOME.

I love thee so much !

SEXTUS.

Goddess !

SALOME.

Hold me tight.

SEXTUS.

Closer than life !

SALOME.

One moment more.

SEXTUS.

For aye !

SALOME.

Now kiss me on mine eyes, and charm away
That which doth haunt them. Dost thou love me still ?

SEXTUS.

Salome ! pity me ; what wouldst thou do ?

SALOME.

And thou wilt love me always ?

SEXTUS.

Naught by thee.

SALOME.

Thou wilt remember me when I am gone ?

SEXTUS.

Thou shalt not go ; imprisoned in these arms
No power shall take thee thence, not even thine own.

SALOME.

I am already gone. That which thou holdest
Is the last shadow of that which I was
Passing away and mingling into night.
Ah ! press me closer, nearer to thy heart.
Another kiss for friendship, one for love,
Another for forgiveness pardoning all,
And so farewell, O heart, O life, farewell.

SEXTUS.

Salome ! I cannot entreat ; behold
My silent anguish, let it plead for me.
What can I say to thee more than I have said ?
For when I said I loved thee I said all.
I have wooed thee even so as best I could.
I have wooed thee as a soldier, told my love

In straight-out phrase which hit its mark, unskilled
With many words to weaken love's avow.
My heart is strong enough to suffer strongly.
I would 'twere weak enough to weakly break,
So woo thee brokenly with broken words
Out of my broken heart, and thus might break
Thy too resolvèd purpose, which, too hard,
Should easily be broken. I would say
With such doubt-breaking truth I love thee thou
Couldst doubt not. I cannot abase myself
Using great oaths to swear that I do love ;
Yet when I tell thee solemnly I love
It is an oath itself the solemnest,
Pledging mine honour to thine honoured trust.
If thou dost doubt me of thyself 'tis well ;
I'll doubt myself henceforth, and trust but thee.
And having said this much, with naught to add,
Will bow to thy decree as 'twere a god's.
But if another have infused in thee
Some loud suspicion or some whispering doubt
I pray thee listen rather to the voice
Of thine own justice and thine own pure heart ;
For I am conscious of integrity,
Nor may I guess by what disjuncture we
Are to be separated, nor the cause.

SALOME.

It is myself.—Oh, thou wilt break my heart !
I never doubted thee. I love thee more
Than words a maiden's tongue can find could tell
Ah ! I am deadly—shudder not nor look
On me with half-averted eyes nor loose

The pressure of thine arms when thou shalt know
All what I have to tell.

SEXTUS.

Let me hear all.

Nothing can change my love, for I am thine
To watch and guard, to succour and to keep,
To love thee until death. My word myself is.
I have given thee my word. If woes assail,
They are for me ; if blessings fall, for thee.
Woes turned from thee by me for me are joys.
Whether with thee, admitted to thy court,
Or banished from thy presence, I shall be
At all times blessed by this one consciousness,
I am watching over thee.

SALOME.

O noble soul !

'Tis I the exile, banished by mine act
From kingdom, country, paradise, in thee.
I am unclean ; a murderess accursed ;
With all the curses of Orestes cursed.
I have raised my hand against a man of God,
And taken away his life. The gods avenge !
O sacrilege ! O death ! O infamy !

SEXTUS.

Alas ! alas ! I hear thee in a dream !

SALOME.

What could I do ? To save thee, save thy life,
I asked John Baptist's, thereunto compelled

By mine own mother ! And they brought his head :—
'Tis there !—it smileth on me ! Blind mine eyes !
O horrible ! alas ! O woe is me !

SEXTUS.

Hush ! hush ! I am with thee ; there is naught to fear.

SALOME.

I am abomination and must go
To retransform myself by holy acts
Of charity and self-denial, pains
And fastings penitential, and so move
His God to pity.

SEXTUS.

Heart most generous !
Thou dost all for me, bravest every risk,
And I do naught for thee. Thy woman's strength
Of magnanimity and fortitude
Putteth all manhood's virtues to the blush.
But think what thou wouldst do and do it not.

SALOME.

Among his people is a vestal sect
Founded by one unfortunate, like me,
Unlike me, guiltless, Jephtha's doomed child,
Who gave herself to charitable deeds.
And many maidens joined themselves to her
And others unto them, in charity
Seeking atonement, or relief from woes.
Abjuring all that women hold most dear
They live a benefaction to their race.
Thus will I do, and thus atone my sin.

SEXTUS.

Nay, be not so deceived ; thou hast no sin.
Nay, be not so unjust to thee and me.
Who acteth by compulsion acteth not ;
Not his the merit nor demerit. Thought
Is act before the gods who judge us. Act
Is but the body, thought the acting soul.
I cannot let thee do thyself this wrong.

SALOME.

But I resisted not ; yea, yielding turned
Into a murderous sword a harmless style.
Of tablets innocent I made a block,
And thus, a traitress, took my master's life.
O horror ! O alas ! O infamy !
Nay, drive me from thee. I unworthy am
That thou shouldst look upon me or hear me speak.
Thou couldst not with Assassination wed,
Nor couldst hold Sacrilege in thine embrace.
The gods abhor me ! I abhor myself.
All nature shrieketh at and hideth from me.
Proscribed ! accursed ! O, woe is me ! alas !

SEXTUS.

Ah ! cease this mourning, love ; thou wert constrained.

SALOME.

I words have heard this night would blight an oak,
Cedars of Lebanon clothe with hues of death.
I have learned to pity me that I was born
And wonder that my blood teemeth not crime
Of its own natural action.

SEXTUS.

My poor child !

SALOME.

Nay, send me from thee. I can never be
That which I was ; for stricken is the flower.
The springs of joyousness, which gave the sap
To youth, are dried, and cankered are my roots.
Thou shalt find naught but blights upon me, blights.
No verdure decketh branches ; pallid leaves
Move lifeless in the breeze too soon to fall.
Let me be prompt to loose thee from thy vows.
My vows are dead, for she is dead who made them.
I am not she—I know not who I am.
But had I been myself I would have died
Rather than shed the blood of that just man.
Yet thus should I have been thy murderess.
What could I do ? how turn ? O gods, have pity !

SEXTUS.

They will have pity ; calm thyself, my life.
I will help thee ; we will each other help.

SALOME.

Where light shall go the shade of infamy
Will rest upon my name, historians tell
The history of this night to blacken me,
And dying I shall live, by all abhorred.
Yet when they shall condemn me, as they will,
And shuddering breathe my name, when they must
 speak it,
And use it for a curse, then say for me,

Salome was a woman pressed by fate
And overcome by fierce disaster ; say
She was a woman not more weak than others,
But that she was o'erpowered by fiercer foes ;
That calmest waters in her sea of life
Opened a whirlpool, and that she went down
In wilder tumults than Charybdis whirlleth
To deeper depths ; she struggled as she could,
And struggling sank. She was more forced to sin
Than sinning ; yet was weak, and so was forced ;
But, mourning what she has done, could not again
Do otherwise. That she was like her sex,
Too strong for weakness and too weak for strength.
And, thus excusing her to injustice, say,
In the great court of human prejudice
She prayed consideration of her woes.

SEXTUS.

O noble heart ! O courage most sublime !
Oh, let me win thee from this cursed belief.

SALOME.

My heart is breaking ; naught can bind it up.
I love thee so I would not have thee suffer.
And yet didst thou not suffer I should be
In tenfold misery. Nay, be not sad—
It is the will of God ; we must submit.

SEXTUS.

Salome ! wilt thou surely leave me thus ?
Hast thou preserved me from oblivion
To put me in the flood with Tantalus ?

To make me live knowing that thou dost live,
But that I ne'er can see thee, speak to thee,
Console thee in thy grief, nor hear thee speak,
Quenching the thirst unquenchable of love
By assurance that thou lovest, giving me
The holy right to kiss away thy tears ?
Salome ! O Salome ! think of this—
How lonely, lifeless, woe-begone the world !

SALOME.

Sextus, thy words have ta'en from me my will,
And I am feeble as a little child,
Am torn in twain by duty and desire.
I cannot stay with thee, it were the price
Of my great crime ; for when she urged me on
The queen consented that I should be thine.

SEXTUS.

Thus from the very gates of Elysium,
For which we have toiled so long, endured so much,
Prayed waiting, hoping, longing, weeping, nay,
Ready to take the battlements by storm,
Thou castest me to torments by a word.

SALOME.

I know not how to leave thee ; gods exact
The sacrifice and they will give me strength.
I never loved thee as I love thee now.
I never knew before the depth of joy
To feel thine arms protecting, holding me ;
To hear thy voice dispelling all alarm
And filling me with calmness, making life

One joy concentrated of every joy.
Yet, ere the sun shake from his glittering locks
The gleaming dust caught from his golden pillow
I must be far beyond the city walls.
When cometh weeping night with dewy tears
And the sad nightingale mourneth her mate
Then will I dare to weep for thee and me,
Nor fear to sin in feeling such regrets
As our first mother felt when forth she went
From Paradise, as I have heard relate,
Since such regrets are my great punishment.

SEXTUS.

Salome ! this is death, long, living death !

SALOME.

Dawn moveth on before the coming day.
I dare not longer tarry, fare thee well.
The gods preserve thee, gods almighty bless,
Comfort and counsel thee, Sextus, my love,
My life, my hope, my future, present, past.
Abhor me not, farewell—farewell—farewell.

VI.

THE QUEEN'S CHAMBER.

HERODIAS WITH JOHN BAPTIST'S HEAD.

HERODIAS.

AT length I am avenged ! Drink, drink, my soul,
The sweet conviction, drink till thou be drunk !
The king, smitten of God before his time,
Eaten alive of worms, in torment howleth,
Calleth for death that cometh not, shall not come,
Till all the horrors of the sepulchre,
The rodent maggots and slow-feeding fires
Which open their dull phosphorescent eyes
Only in darkness, putrefaction black,
And stifling mould, that shooteth creeping roots
And groweth forests crushing flesh to dust,
Shall in his life be felt. His body thus
Not dying but consumed, his soul shall go
Swift to black Hades and Tartarian woe.
Salome, from the world self-banishèd,
Seeketh to find her exile in the world,
And by self-punishment to make amends,
Self-judging, self-accused, and ignorant
That man may pray and pray and still be damned,

May practise charity and still be damned,
Inflict self-punishment and still be damned ;
Forgetful that, if there be real offence,
The offended power alone can name the price
Of full forgiveness. 'Tis her fantasy,
Led on by virtue—virtue is such a fool !
And thou, sweet head, yea, thou art mine at last !
What ! thou canst yet smile while I speak to thee ?
I thought my voice, like a storm-breeding wind,
Would chase that smile away and gather frowns
To flash their lightnings from thy brow of heaven.
I would have mingled all thy blood with mine
And sent it forth in such heaven-daring life
That e'en Prometheus in comparison
Should fail in enterprise, and all the Titans
Pigmies and poltroons show ; could that not be
I would have given all my blood to thee.
But thou disdainedst me ! These smiling lips
Have spoken the only words I ever heard
Since tearful Innocence bade me good-bye
A weary time ago, could make the life
Mount from my heart to watch-towers of my cheeks
To see who thus so loudly summoned it.
Thou hast paid the penalty of thy disdain.
Where was thy God ? Could He not save thee ? Eh ?
Is there then aught a woman may not do ?
Now will I even defy thy God Himself,
And in His temple will I make my bed,
And on His altar will dream dreams of thee,
My sweet ! Some living semblance of thyself—
What ! thou dost frown at last ? 'Tis thine old trick
When I did meet thee. 'Twill not fright me now

Nor turn me back, nor make me hold my tongue.
Thou threatenedst me with judgment and with hell,
Yet thou art mine ! I can embrace thee even,
And weave my lily fingers in thy hair,
And stroke thy temples, fondle thee, and hate !
Recall thyself to life and list to me
While here I mock thee, spurn thee, spit on thee.
Why liest thou there ? What ! wouldst thou plead to me ?
Ah ! thou art very pale ; where is the health
Which blossomed like a garden in thy face
And brought forth manly beauty ? Where the flush
Of indignation or of shame whenever
I spoke to thee ? Eh ? Let me call it back
With acts would shame the satyrs in their dens.
It cometh not ! What ? Thy proud virtue sleepeth
And all the blushes which have guarded it
Are melted by their own inherent fire
And dribble down to cool in this flat dish.
In spite of thee I play among thy roses,
Restore them thus to abdicated thrones
On pale cheeks, yea, on this majestic brow,
Or call them up with mine all-potent kiss.
Come, let me taste thy virtuous, scornful lips—

A VOICE.

Go to thy place !

HERODIAS.

Oh ! horror ! life ! Oh ! death !

VII.

A WOOD.

SALOME.

SALOME.

HERE will I rest until my maidens come
To mourn with me. In voiceless solitudes,
Where love and longing to behold create
A presence sensible of the beloved,
I shall, henceforth alone, not be alone.
Yet is this presence to my conscious heart
As circumambient mist to thirsty souls,
The intangible presentment of their wish.
Alas ! I never more may look for showers,
Nor dews, nor springs, nor rivulets nor lakes ;
But far before me to the vast and dim,
The infinite of space, a desert drear
Stretcheth interminable ; scorching sands
Return the glare of a more scorching sun
And sluggish winds, as hot and tainting breath
Of sleeping monsters, burn and blast my cheek.
I'll go to deeper shade and solitude ;
For deepest solitude is solitude
Least deep for me, since I am so dissolved

To unsubstantial being by the void
Of beings substantive and sensible
That with the unsubstantial forms of love
I may hold converse ; my reality
Thus disappearing, they are real to me,
And I am still with him who is love to me.
Here will I rest while o'er my head the trees,
Hoary with moss, hold out their trembling hands,
And pray for me, like low-voiced priests at prayer,
While in the dale the self-amusing brook,
In reverence leaving leaps from stone to stone,
Slow, softly and solemnly goeth on sand.
The birds have ceased their earlier morning songs,
And listening with bent heads and folded wings
Say amen and amen from time to time.
Prayer dwelleth in this place ; the gods are near.
O God, behold mine utter helplessness,
Have pity on mine utter worthlessness,
Redeem me from mine utter guiltiness,
And give me of thine utter righteousness.

Enter a Stranger.

STRANGER.

Lorn damsel !

SALOME.

Sir !

STRANGER.

Thou weepest ; wherefore ?

SALOME.

Alas !

STRANGER.

Say, wherefore weepest thou ?

SALOME.

I am lost ! I am lost !

STRANGER.

In this dark wood ?

SALOME.

In darkness of a wood

Where by my coming all the air is dead.

The innocent trees aghast all shuddering stand

And would avoid me but relentless roots

Hold them to bear the horror of my sight

And feel the torment of my loathsome presence.

STRANGER.

Hath no one pitied thee ?

SALOME.

Me ? No one can.

I have accursed myself, and I must wander

Forever and forever seeking light

But never finding it. Or in the wood,

Or in the city's streets or crowded courts,

In an illumined palace or dark cell

I have the terror of great darkness on me.

My crimes give forth most suffocating blackness

As suns give brightness forth. My doom is just.

STRANGER.

Even of the tomb the darkness shall be bright.

SALOME.

I am oppressed with sense of grievous guilt,
Nor can I find surcease nor know I where
To turn for help or comfort ; here, condemned,
I seek a way to expiate my sin
While conscience, restless, will not let me rest,
Approveth naught, and will not let me choose.

STRANGER.

There is a Way.

SALOME.

What is it? Where?

STRANGER.

The Truth.

SALOME.

And what can guide me into it?

STRANGER.

The Light.

SALOME.

I am lost ! I am lost !

STRANGER.

One hath come to save the lost.

SALOME.

Ah ! my offence is registered in heaven.

STRANGER.

Atoning blood can wash the record out.

SALOME.

What is the sacrifice?

STRANGER.

The Lamb of God.

SALOME.

One whom I have not name told me of Him.

STRANGER.

Salome, not the blood of beasts or birds,
Nor penitential pains and misery
Could ever atone for man's continuing sin.
But while he was proscribed and on his way
To dreadful dungeons of eternal death
God pined him so much He sent His Son
To lift the bar and open prison doors
For whosoever would believe in Him.
Such perish not, but have eternal life.

SALOME.

Where is the Son, that I may seek and find Him?

STRANGER.

He is the Lamb of God; believeest thou?

SALOME.

I would believe: help thou mine unbelief.

STRANGER.

The children shall not for the parents die:

Each for himself shall bear iniquity,
The Christ for all who will come unto Him.

SALOME.

I will come to Him ; He can cleanse me wholly.

STRANGER.

Thy faith hath saved thee ; thou mayst go in peace.

SALOME.

May I not follow Him ?

STRANGER.

Thou shalt ; but learn
That they best follow Him who best fulfil
Their duties to their race as God ordained,
Loving their neighbour even as themselves
And God with all their heart, and soul, and mind ;
By being true to those whom God hath bound
In clusters with them on the vine of life.
Not in the literal and formal act
With due observance of religious rites
And many words professing Him as Lord
Is He best followed. They who follow Him
In spirit and in truth best follow Him ;
And they shall be the favourites of His fold,
And He shall know them though the world do not,
And He will love them. They shall keep His words
Which, grafted in them, spring to endless life.
Who thus shall follow Him shall ne'er taste death.

SALOME.

The Truth I feel ; it is revealed by thee,
The Light thou sheddest hath enlightened me,
If thou wilt go before I see the Way,
Let me walk with thee lest I go astray.

VIII.

GARDEN OF THE PALACE.

SEXTUS *and* ANTONIUS.

ANTONIUS.

WHAT ! Sextus ! what ! Dost sleep ? Arouse thee, man !
The dawn hath climbed the heavens and, one by one
Plucked the ripe stars. Thou shouldst ere now have
filled
Thy garner full of sleep and harvested
Thy rest. Wilt thou away with me to Rome ?

SEXTUS.

To Rome ? Yea, anywhere ; let's go at once.

ANTONIUS.

What aileth thee ? Wherefore this pallor strange ?
This recklessness of haste ? Why hangst thou out
Those signals of distress on either lid ?
Why burn those cresting beacons on each cheek ?

SEXTUS.

I am a coward—cowards may shed tears.
I have been wounded.

ANTONIUS.

That is plain as truth.
No blood is left in thee. Those ruddy lakes
On either side the mountain ridge of thy face,
Which glowed with roseate sheen beneath thine orbs
Have all run out and left pale, empty beds ;
And there is not fire enough in thy dull eyes
To light a maiden's fumbling lips to thine.
Say, hast thou watched in vain ? Hath she not come ?
Or hath the storm unhinged thy youthful wits ?

SEXTUS.

The storm ? What storm ? Ah, true, I mind me now.
How went the storm abroad ? What hast thou seen ?

ANTONIUS.

More wonders than portended Cæsar's death.
In heaven two stars came from the almighty throne.
The first was brighter than the brightest star ;
The second, brighter than the sun at noon,
Followed the first a little way behind.
The first in form a man ; the second God.
A gliding meteor whirled around the first,
And drew it from its seat and put it out.
Then all the planets gathered to one place
And lifted up the second on a cross
Which spanned the heavens and covered the whole earth.
And when the second bowed its head and failed
Deep darkness filled the entire universe
And all the shivering stars in heaven were quenched.

SEXTUS.

What might this mean ?

ANTONIUS.

I know not ; these are signs
Beyond my comprehension. In the womb
Of destiny some monstrous chronicle
Throeing the world is struggling for its birth.
And there were sounds of voices in the air
Like sounds of oceans teased by wanton winds ;
The earth with ague shook and gasped with pain.

SEXTUS.

I heard them ; they portend no good to us.

ANTONIUS.

The night was savage, freshly come from chaos ;
The wild winds sobbed like wailing goddesses,
Lifted their voices, tore their cloudy hair,
While fires burned pale in the black firmament.
Just now a Jewish soldier of the guard,
Half dead with fear, recounted unto me
The things which he had seen. The donjon shook
And quivered with a murmur to its base ;
While in the temple of these restless Jews
The ever-burning fires went out ; the graves
Of prophets oped and hoary they came forth
And o'er the city stretched their bounden hands
In silence weeping ; then in awful state
Of ghostly apparition they moved on,
Like white clouds passing through the midnight air,

In weird procession toward the donjon tower.
Above the topmost turrets of the keep
A flame arose and disappeared in heaven.
The ghostly forms once more stretched forth their hands
Over the city, turning every way,
And with one voice a simultaneous woe
Pronounced, which wailing, and reverberating died
In thunder as they slowly vanishèd.
Upon the temple's highest tower appeared
A form of fire, which held a blazing sword
And brandished it in mazy lightning strokes
Toward Mount Sion ; in the clouds he faded.
Like wolds lamenting and the ocean's moan
Sounded afar his flaming chariot wheels.
Sure these are signs enough to shake the nerves
Of older men than thou, and conjure fear
From coward hiding-places. If thou fearest—

SEXTUS.

I fear? Thou know'st not what thou sayest—I fear?
Yea, truly—I fear myself—I will not boast
My courage ; it is gone. I am afraid.
Antonius, spare me thy raillery
And I will tell thee all.

ANTONIUS.

Tell me, my friend.
I do divine it now ; but tell it me,
And thou shalt see I have a heart can feel,
As well as hide its tenderest, bitterest part.

SEXTUS.

I ne'er shall see Salome more.

ANTONIUS.

Alas !

Thou couldst not profit by experience
Of mine ; I gladly would have saved thee this.
Women are learning always ; they would know
How tasteth the forbidden and unknown.
Therefore are they not constant. Constancy
Content is idle, handleth but one book,
Spoileth its freshness, noteth not its text,
Instead, reciteth fond imaginings
Engendered by its title and fair outside,
And dieth dully and happily ignorant.
Who would the secret place of knowledge find
Peruseth lineaments of many volumes.
Its contents known each one is put aside.
Thus women read us as a library,
And thus they know our weakness and our strength
Better than we ourselves. Nay, be a man,
Nor let me see in thee another wreck
Foundered on quicksands of inconstancy.

SEXTUS.

Oh, she is constant as the constant tides
Whose ardour centuries of failures cool not,
But, still as eager as on the first day
When they were driven back from kissing heaven,
They upward leap with panting, foaming lips,
Up to embrace the sky, as hounds in leash
Held back and dragged away to come again.
She is verily constant, but the destinies
By her too tender conscience drag her hence.
They have taken her away, and now she goeth,

L

Led from me, looking back and mourning still.
Hence, hence with me and I will tell thee all
I will recount to thee my misery.
Its cause, its passion and its hopelessness.
But this thou shalt believe, that she is constant.

ANTONINE.

I will when I believe that fire is cold,
Ice hot, sun night, night noon, an arrant thief
A safe companion for an honest man,
Or honesty is kept in beauteous caskets.
Then will I think also that honesty
Is cased in woman. Fie! thou art like one
Who standing in a furnace crieth out
Consumed by roying flames, and yet who sweareth
Not his fire burneth, though all others may;
Therefore will he not budge. Come with me now.
I have a daughter, if she liveth still,
Should have the age of thine absconded love.
She had her name, a name most dear to me.
She should be beautiful; her mother was;
She should be good—I dare not think on that.
My heart yearneth toward her,—she is good.
I go Romeward to find her, if I can.
If she be living and be worthy thee,
As grant the gods she may, and ye can love
When thou, more wise than I, shalt have been cured
Of this poor torturing fever killing not,
Then she is thine as wife; if not as wife,
Why then as sister. Thou shalt be my son.
We will together live, and our round world,
Ourselves alone, shall be a trinity.

SEXTUS.

I never can forget to love Salome,
Nor yet remember e'er to love another.
But I will go with thee, I will go with thee.

*Enter Herodias with chorus of Attendants, Romans
and Jews.*

Behold the queen !

ANTONIUS.

The queen ! sayest thou ? the queen ?
The queen I never saw—and yet—and yet—
Ye gods immortal ! It is Livia !
A guilty counterpart of the innocent self !
Could not ten chilling years have numbed my heart
And with their tempests worn her image out ?
Made powerless blood which beateth insurrection,
And hardened sinews which do fail me now ?

HERODIAS.

Revenged ! revenged ! revenged !—Go to thy place !

CHORUS, Romans and Jews.

Gone are the signs in the heavens !
Gone are the sails !
Gone is the rudder !
Tossed and beaten of waves !
Tossed and fearfully driven !
Stranded ! stranded the vessel !

HERODIAS.

Go to thy place ! aha ! go to thy place !

CHORUS, *Romans and Jews.*

Reason is whelmed by the tempest,
Light of the stars is hidden by clouds of despair !
Night cometh dark from the dreadful regions of madness !

HERODIAS.

Where is Salome ? Ha ! I am revenged !

CHORUS, *Romans and Jews.*

Charmed by revenge,
Bound in its folds and writhing,
Writhing, stung and maddened to frenzy.

ANTONIUS.

Salome ! ah ! Salome ! She is my child !
Where is she, Sextus ? Fetch her, bring her here !
I'll seek her, find her ! Sextus, sluggard ! come !
Where is my child, my daughter, all my world ?
I tell thee I must have her !

SEXTUS.

Ask the gods
To give her back-; she is a vestal.

ANTONIUS.

Nay !
I'll not believe it, Nay ! Ye gods ! Ye gods !
Exhaust your thunderbolts upon my head,
Empty your quivers, send me all your plagues
In this most rueful moment of my life,
My life most rueful, crush with maledictions

And in oblivion let me now forget
That ye hold maledictions still for me.—
I tell thee I will have her ! Jove himself
Shall rival me in vain ! She is my child !
All I have but disasters.

SEXTUS.

No more thine.
She is lost to us, driven hence, herself accursed
By that arch-hatcher of conspiracies
Her mother.

ANTONIUS.

Livia again ! Just gods !
What train of curses doth he take who taketh
A wanton wife ! Oh ! I would rather be
Chained to Prometheus's rock, my vitals eaten
By vultures daily ; have my breath consumed
By noisome stench of Harpies ; rather lie
With Typhon roaring under Etna's flames,
Or in the flood with Tantalus be burned
By deathless thirst, or with Ixion chained
By brazen bands upon a fiery wheel ;
Rather with Sisyphus toil all my days
Than wed with such a wife, more rich in ills
Than was Pandora. Yet, whate'er he do
Who thus is wed, Jove, spare thy thunderbolts,
He is punished in advance. And yet—and yet—
I love her, Sextus ; how I love her still !
The shame I feel for loving cannot drive
Love from my heart, nor can the misery
Which she hath caused me. Stay, stay yet a space,
While I take my last look and so sum up

My life ; then straightway will I forth with thee
To seek my child. If we shall find her, well ;
If not, to search is all that now is left me.
And if I find her not I may find Death,
The next best, dearest friend. Ah ! I was strong,
And when I had a daughter I was brave.
Now am I weak and have no courage left.

HERODIAS.

Toads all of them ; not even food for serpents.

ANTONIUS.

Ye gods, give back my child, O give her back !
I have grown old while still in my full prime.
Look at my hair, is it not white with age ?
No ill can touch me now ; I am ill proof.
I could defy the vengeance of the Diræ
To make me feel afflictions. I am benumbed
With them ; and this, this last, so rude, so fell
Hath changed me from a target for misfortunes
To a misfortune, and henceforth I go
Mixed with calamities as one of them,
Without intent and without malice cursing.

HERODIAS.

Why lookst thou so at me ! Am I a sea
From which thy suns draw showers ? Am I the sun
That thus thine eyes run o'er like lakes in spring
When melt the frozen snows ? I am avenged !

ANTONIUS.

Nay, Livia, speak to me ; know'st me not ?

HERODIAS.

Nay,—yea,—thou art the witch who long ago
Stole my Antonius—Go ! go thy ways.
Hast seen Antonius ?—Antonius—
Who called me Livia ? Ha, ha, revenged !

ANTONIUS.

Look on my face ; I have seen Antonius.

HERODIAS.

Ah, then I pity him ; thou art the beast
Which black malignity begot on folly.
Well thou resemblest on thy mother's side
Antonius, for he left me alone.

ANTONIUS.

Avenging gods ! What punishment is hers !

HERODIAS.

The witch doth mutter ; go thy ways, witch, go ;
I shall be damned and thy hard mistress soon.
And when I am damned I'll burn thee, tear thy hair.
Yea, go thy ways, witch, go and mock me not.

SEXTUS.

The gods have mercy !—This is terrible !

HERODIAS.

Hush ! hush ! there spoke the king of newts and toads.
He croaketh badly. I have seen his majesty
I' th' mud, I' th' mud. Croak me a song, good king ;
'Tis something worse than dirge for me to die by.

ANTONIUS.

Ah ! Livia ! is this the fearful end ?

HERODIAS.

End ! Nay ! 'Tis the beginning ; go, begone,
For thou the essence of damnation art,
And let me not be forced to swallow thee
Before my time. I'll find thee soon in Hades.

SEXTUS.

It is the retribution of the gods !

HERODIAS.

Thou hast seen Antonius ? I know thee now.
Thou art the fury fell who drove him hence
Come back to mock me. I will pinch thee for it ;
I'll pinch thee, pinch thee, pinch thee—Give me air !

ANTONIUS.

Alas ! my bleeding heart ! bleed on ! bleed on !

HERODIAS.

The fury whispereth ; send the fury hence,
Or burn her till she bring Antonius—
I want to see him, see him ere I die.
O woe ! O woe ! O horror ! life ! O death !

CHORUS, *Romans and Jews.*

The dark-handed angel ! The dark-handed angel
Darkly he cometh from dark caves of life,
Lifteth the weight of humanity's burdens,

Lifteth the terrible woe of humanity ;
Deepest and dimmest of mysteries
Hidden by mysteries dimmest and deepest,
Beareth man on his noiseless wings
To mysteries dimmer and deeper.

HERODIAS.

He cometh there ! I feel his fingers pierce
Into my throat !—Unhand me, Death !—Away !

SEMI-CHORUS, *Romans.*

From the blissful moments, islands of bliss
Resting enchanted amid the billows of life,
Over the wavelets of time
That cease to move for a space
To linger upon the shores,
The shores of those islands of bliss,
Cometh thin vapour and mists and the herald concealed,
Sent by the gods in the haze of joy and of rapture.

HERODIAS.

To ask forgiveness—'tis a coward's act ;
I'll go down cursing, and defy the gods.

SEMI-CHORUS, *Romans.*

Noiseless he treadeth the waves, nor rustle his garments.
Suddenly changeth his raiment !
Blackness enshroudeth him !
Billows beneath his shade grow dark and appalling
Lost are the islands of bliss !
Lost is the light of the skies !
Lost is the land !

Over the black waves of time,
Terrible, wildly and swiftly now rolling,
Huge and frowning and awful the cloud of death moveth.

HERODIAS.

Say, what wouldst thou with me ?—Oh ! Give me air !
Revenged ! I'll be upon the gods avenged !

CHORUS, *Romans and Jews.*

Death spreadeth darkly above thee,
Descendeth, descendeth upon thee
Suffocating ! suffocating ! ah !
Joys have fled from thine arms,
Pleasures have fled,
Terrors hold thee in their talons !

HERODIAS.

Thy boat ! thy boat ! Charon, I come ! I come !

SEMI-CHORUS, *Jews.*

Sure is the justice of God,
Awfully stern its decrees ;
Patience restraineth its hand
Till the day be passed, till the evening.

HERODIAS.

The fiend doth beckon me—go ye aside.
I'll in with him, and o'er the fires of hell
Brew curses for ye all—away ! away !
Torment me not before my time ; away !

SEMI-CHORUS, *Jews.*

Sold in the days of its beauty and strength unto evil
For lust and ambition and passion and power
Lingering still upon earth,
Hideous and writhing, the soul is already with devils.

HERODIAS.

Ye'll chase me, will ye? Ye will send me hence?
I will return and lead the damned in troops
To be revenged on ye—nay, give me air.
The steam of hell doth choke me—give me air!

CHORUS, *Romans and Jews.*

Swiftly the soul approacheth its prison,
The caverns of burning remorse,
Where its impotent hate,
Despairing, shall foam with impotent ragings.

HERODIAS.

The ways grow dark—devils and furies, ho!
What! light your torches and receive your queen!
Let me not grope in silence down to hell
But come with swift descent and loud acclaim.

CHORUS, *Romans and Jews.*

Darker and darker the way,
Fires of Hades illume not;
Night broodeth there and its light is the blackness of
darkness.
Slow to the doer of evil
Seemeth his course to destruction;

Silent his thundering way and the storms that surround
him ;
Fain would he hasten his steps,
Fain would he publish his infamy wider.

HERODIAS.

What ! ho ! up, guards of hell and seneschal !
Down with your drawbridge ! Call your warders out !
Summon your princes to their loftiest hall !
Your mistress usher as meriteth her state !

CHORUS, *Romans and Jews.*

Watchmen watch from towers of hell forever,
Princely messengers with flaming wings invite,
Princes wait in state for proud and powerful,
Weak and mean, and rich and poor alike.
Its drawbridge ever is down,
Ever its gates are open,
Ever its warders are ready.
Enemies approach not ;
Dreading no foes,
It feareth no hostile invasion.

HERODIAS.

'Tis darker still ; the devils then are dead,
The fires of hell gone out, the furies sleep.
I'll wake them, light their fires, and send them forth.
Nothing in hell shall sleep when I am there.

SEMI-CHORUS, *Romans.*

Sleepless is Evil and sleep
Cannot abide, but fleeth in terror its presence.

Sleep is the couch of the just, at night their health-giving
garment ;
Sleep the reward of the gods to the pure and the gentle
of spirit.

HERODIAS.

I come ! I come ! world, for a space, good-night.
Hail ! Pluto, hail ! infernal horrors ! hail !

Dies.

SEMI-CHORUS, *Jews.*

Thus, alone and revengeful and raging,
Goeth the soul to blackest perdition
When the Lord is despised and condemnèd,
When His servants are mocked and abusèd.

ANTONIUS.

So farewell, Livia, alas ! alas !

CHORUS, *Romans and Jews.*

Out of the vast and the dim, the hall of his star-pillared
palace,
Steppeth the sun in its strength ; he taketh his bow and
his quiver.
Filled is his quiver with days, and bound together with
ages.
Shaketh he light from his locks ; he girdeth mists
flaming about him,
Taketh an arrowy day and bendeth his bow the electric.
Swiftly, far, gleaming and sharp the shaft skims the airy
abysses,
Redly it quivereth in earth, and sheddeth its light o'er
the waters.

Night, with beneficent shade, and with dewy balm and
with slumber,
Cometh on silvery wings and withdraweth the light-
giving arrow,
Wrappeth the earth in its mantle and cooleth the wound
and the fever,
Placeth the languishing earth in oblivion sweetly to
slumber.
So from the light-giving hand of the mighty Creator,
Life-Giver,
Speedeth the arrowy life and quivereth in man for a
season ;
So still, beneficent Death withdraweth the feverous
arrow,
Giveth the longed-for repose and envelopeth man in its
shadow.

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